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S.) BATTALION  
HAMPTONSHIRE REGIMENT

1914—1919



Feb. 1. 1890

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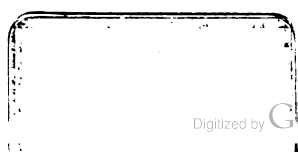




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*Photo : J. Mills, Northampton.]*

**LIEUT.-COLONEL E. R. MOBBS. D.S.O.**

*[Frontispiece.]*

7th (S.) BATTALION  
NORTHAMPTONSHIRE REGIMENT

1914—1919

10026

BY

H. B. KING, M.C.

*Scholar, Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge*  
*Late Captain 7th Northamptonshire Regiment*

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TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
LIEUT.-COLONEL A. PARKIN  
LIEUT.-COLONEL E. R. MOBBS, D.S.O.  
OFFICERS, NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS AND MEN  
OF THE 7TH (S.) BATT. NORTHAMPTONSHIRE REGT.  
WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THEIR COUNTRY  
AND WHOSE EXAMPLE LED THEIR COMRADES  
TO VICTORY  
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED  
BY THE AUTHOR





**“ Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead !  
There’s none of these so lonely and poor of old,  
But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.  
These laid the world away ; poured out the red  
Sweet wine of youth ; gave up the years to be  
Of work and joy, and that unhopèd serene,  
That men call age ; and those who would have been,  
Their sons, they gave, their immortality.”**

**—RUPERT BROOKE.**





## INTRODUCTION

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WAR is fatal to memory. The present is so all-absorbing that even the immediate past is soon forgotten. Time reduces tense moments to commonplace incidents, and the most thrilling periods to trivial episodes.

So much is undoubtedly true during wartime, but now the greatest war of all time itself seems but a nightmare memory returns to these commonplace incidents and trivial episodes, and invests them with fresh importance. Especially is this true of those who have spent their most impressionable years living, as has been said, "through months of sheer boredom, relieved at intervals by moments of intense fear."

Twentieth-century warfare—at any rate, such as has recently been seen in Europe—has lost much of the glamour of bygone ages. Even the uniform itself, hitherto designed to be as impressive as possible, must now conform to the colour of the ground or horizon, and be as inconspicuous as possible. This change in externals has not produced a corresponding difference in other ways. War still calls forth the same qualities and demands the same spirit of sacrifice.

Even the highly civilized creature of this century is still human, and as such his ultimate appeal is still to force.

Wrong though this will sound to many, it can hardly be denied, and should not even be deplored.

War may or may not bring out all the worst of which man is capable, but even if it does these vices are more than compensated by the fine qualities war develops—courage, comradeship, and self-sacrifice. The very

rules of society demand these latter. A battalion, to succeed on the field of battle, must be more than a collection of trained individuals held together by a common discipline : war requires more even than individual self-sacrifice and personal courage ; it requires these to be welded together by comradeship and cemented by a common interest.

This truth has been the background on which the county regiments have woven their traditions and made the British Army a formidable, if numerically contemptible, force.

The outbreak of war in August, 1914, was followed by an immediate rush to arms by the youth of the country, and regiments that had hitherto been compelled to recruit where they could were suddenly called on to absorb the pick of the manhood of the country.

It was just this patriotic zeal that made possible the creation of "Pals' Corps." Friends joined together, bringing their several individualities to be absorbed, and yet developed in one common end.

This that was true of so many Service battalions was especially true of the 7th (S.) Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment, raised in August and the early days of September, 1914. Edgar Mobbs had no difficulty other than selection in raising a company from his friends and admirers, to be known throughout the country as "Mobbs' Corps." Councillor Whitsed soon raised a company in Peterborough, known for a time as "Whitsed's Light Infantry." Guy Paget, of Sulby Hall, raised others from the county, and the battalion, as it assembled at Shoreham Camp in September, 1914, could truly claim to be a county effort and a collection of friends. Londoners and others were indeed to be found in its ranks, and brought much to the common good ; but the Northamptonshire element predominated to a degree unknown for centuries in the Regular battalions of the Regiment.

A New Army unit lacked much that a Regular unit possessed.

Tradition it had none, except that which the parent unit handed down for safe custody ; officers who had trained and trained with their men were necessarily lacking at the start.

A New Army unit had, however, great compensations, chief of which was, perhaps, the enthusiasm that permeated all its members, and the fact that all had joined for one purpose, which was to beat the enemy and beat him quickly.

The author, the first New Army officer to join the 7th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment in September, 1914, and to whom nearly five years after fell the duty of entraining its cadre for England, has had exceptional opportunities of studying the career of a New Army battalion, and this little book is written to revive and stimulate the *esprit de corps* that made a Kitchener battalion what it was, and led it to eventual victory.

A history of the 7th Battalion this is not ; such would be outside the scope of a work of this size, if, indeed, it were possible at all with the existing perspective. What is aimed at is rather an account of some of the doings of the battalion that will help those who participated in its fortunes to recollect their own experiences, and at the same time afford to those who have so nobly supported the county regiment some insight into the life and work of a Service battalion that contributed its share to the downfall of the Prussian Philosophy of Might.

The German at first treated with contempt the British Regular Army, but his opinion of the New Armies defied utterance. It was not possible for the imagination of the German to see in the jovial assortment of civilians at Shoreham in September, 1914, the composite unit that was to defy the Prussian Guards,

and drive before it the pick of an army trained for years for the conquest of the world.

German discipline, based as all else German on force, could never have accomplished this feat, which was, however, accomplished in the New Armies of the British Empire, thanks to the spirit of comradeship that permeated such battalions as the 7th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment.

This book has been written from a recollection of most of the events narrated, though, where necessary, memory has been prompted by resource to the official "War Diaries." It cannot thus claim to narrate more than a fraction of the history of the battalion, and many will find inaccuracies for which the author pleads pardon, while thanking all those who have assisted him with suggestions and have rendered possible the production of these memoirs.

# CONTENTS

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CHAPTER	PAGE
I. SHOREHAM ... ..	1
II. SOUTHWICK AND REIGATE ... ..	7
III. WOKING ... ..	13
IV. ORDEAL BY BATTLE ... ..	17
V. WINTER OF 1915 ... ..	23
VI. HOOGE ... ..	30
VII. MESSINES, 1916 ... ..	38
VIII. SOMME, 1916 ... ..	45
IX. VIMY AND LOOS, 1916 ... ..	51
X. VIMY, 1917 ... ..	57
XI. MESSINES, 1917 ... ..	64
XII. YPRES, 1917 ... ..	70
XIII. WINTER OF 1917-1918 ... ..	79
XIV. MARCH, 1918 ... ..	84
XV. HILL 70 AND LENS ... ..	92
XVI. FINAL OFFENSIVE ... ..	99
XVII. ARMISTICE ... ..	107
XVIII. ENVOI ... ..	113

---

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

---

LT.-COL. E. R. MOBBS, D.S.O. ... ..	<i>Frontispiece</i>
CAPT. T. G. PAGET, FIRST ADJUTANT OF THE BATTALION	<i>facing p. 4</i>
DUMMY MACHINE GUN WITH DRUMMERS ... ..	,, p. 12
MEMBERS OF D COMPANY, SEPTEMBER, 1914... ..	,, p. 21
LT.-COL. S. S. HAYNE, D.S.O. ... ..	,, p. 84
LT.-COL. E. C. S. GRUNE ... ..	,, p. 100
ILLUSTRATING OPERATIONS, MARCH, 1918 ... ..	,, p. 88
ILLUSTRATING FINAL OPERATIONS, 1918 ... ..	,, p. 99



## CHAPTER I

### SHOREHAM

It was a feeling of relief that greeted the first New Army officer as he arrived at Shoreham in Sussex to join the 7th Northamptonshire Regiment. Here at last was an officer to share the multitudinous duties that had to be performed in those early days of a citizen army. The group of officers assembled in the orderly-room tent as the young officer reported included Lieutenant-Colonel A. Parkin, Captain T. G. Paget, Major C. Bagnall, and Lieutenant and Quartermaster J. S. Fowler. These officers had been working night and day, and it was only natural that such duties as Orderly Officer should be handed over to the new officer to be held in perpetuity or until other officers arrived to share the duty.

Anyone who has any knowledge of the problems that beset a Kitchener battalion in the early days of the war will realize at once the Herculean task that all ranks were called on to perform in September, 1914. It is indeed true that the battalion was already formed on paper, while the men could be seen on parade, and officers were joining the battalion daily for duty. It is, however, equally true that as yet the 7th (S.) Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment was a collection of enthusiastic amateurs, and much remained to be done before these men could be reckoned a battalion to which the traditions of the 48th and 58th Foot might be entrusted.

Recruits they were in name as they paraded in Buckingham Park, Shoreham, but they had few of the appurtenances usually associated with the Army.



Rifles they had none, nor even khaki ; each wore his civilian clothing, while the N.C.Os. were distinguished by a white or red arm-band for corporals and sergeants and a red sash for sergeant-majors. One or two old soldiers wore medal ribbons on their civilian waist-coats, and these were instantly singled out for non-commissioned rank. One ribbon conferred corporal's stripes, while two secured sergeant's stripes. A suit of khaki which one or two had preserved from former service also was certain to be favourably considered by the Adjutant in his search for possible section commanders.

It was not only previous service that was recognized in this search for N.C.Os. : Edgar Mobbs, H. Grierson, D. Farrer, and others that had joined E. R. M. as he assembled "D" Company, were placed in charge of platoons until they were willing to take the commissions that they refused as yet.

This method of selecting N.C.Os. whose previous history was unknown will to-day appear ludicrous, but it was the only solution of a serious problem that all Kitchener battalions had to face, and it may as well be asserted at once that the system worked well and gave splendid results. There were isolated cases, indeed, where this method broke down ; one old soldier, at any rate, after holding two staff appointments on Battalion Headquarters, was eventually reduced to the ranks. Such cases were, however, the exception.

It has already been said that the majority were still dressed in their civilian attire. This lack of uniform had its compensations, and it was not uncommon to see a member of the battalion in Shoreham village after hours, who when questioned would assert that he was one of McAlpine's men, who were building a hutment camp close by the existing quarters of the 7th North-amptons. There can be no doubt that this civilian dress was more popular than the dark blue emergency

uniform that was issued to the battalion in October, 1914.

The existing supplies of khaki were required to refit the original Expeditionary Force in France, that had recently suffered such heavy losses, and thus an issue was made to the New Armies of a blue uniform that resembled that worn by a tube conductor, or even a convict. This emergency dress was issued in only four sizes ; and one company certainly was called upon to fit its members with two sizes, one very large and one very small. The battalion tailors, however, worked to such good purpose that in a week at the most the whole battalion was passably fitted, and presented for the first time some idea of uniformity.

Lack of khaki and the possession of convict dress were not, however, the only troubles with which the battalion had to contend. Everything was deficient ; the men were crowded in tents without floor-boards, while for a time an adequate supply of blankets was only obtained through the generosity of the people of Northampton and Worthing.

It would have been only natural if these and other discomforts, too numerous to relate, had damped the enthusiasm of the men, but such was not the case. Everyone recognized that England, as a whole, had been caught unprepared for war ; and the marvel was not the lack of preparation for a citizen army, but rather that units like the 7th Northamptons, left to their own devices during these critical months, organized themselves as they did, and attained so quickly a high standard of proficiency.

While Sergeant E. R. Mobbs was the life and soul of the battalion as a whole, the Adjutant, Captain T. G. Paget, the first officer to join the battalion, was responsible for much of the early organization, in which he was ably assisted by Lieutenant and Quartermaster J. S. Fowler.

The young officer was always the special butt of the Adjutant, and his first remark to one youngster is worth recording: "In a fortnight you will hate the sight of me." These words, taken in jest, came true, though the time allotted was unnecessarily long. Captain Paget, himself an ex-Scots Guardsman, spared neither himself nor his subalterns. The latter, when not on parade with their platoons or doing physical drill with R.S.M. Parsons, were kept busy by the Adjutant practising sword drill in the approved Guards' manner. These parades, held between the officers' and men's quarters, were always largely attended by the men as lookers-on, who thoroughly enjoyed watching the discomforts of their platoon leaders and listening to the helpful encouragement of Captain Paget.

The Adjutant saw to it that he was thoroughly disliked by the young officers in these early days, but it would be a mistake to imagine that an Adjutant who does his duty is always unpopular in a regiment; and Captain Paget was soon forgiven by his late victims when they realized that it was not they, but he, who was the hardest-working officer in the battalion.

To add to the already comic appearance of the battalion, dressed in its blue uniform, an issue of wooden dummy rifles was made. These rifles, resembling the real article neither in shape, weight, nor appearance, can only have been issued to humiliate the growing pride of the battalion, and they were seldom used except as clothes-lines for washing between the rows of tents.

When one considers practical jokes of this nature, it is fortunate for the early musketry training that Lancing College was close at hand. There the battalion marched each day and borrowed the O.T.C. rifles, and was instructed in their use by the O.C. of the Corps, Major Haig-Brown.

The situation of the camp of the 24th Division, in



**CAPTAIN T. G. PAGET,**  
**First Adjutant of the Battalion.**

*To face page 4.*



the 73rd Infantry Brigade of which the 7th Northamp-tons were serving, was in many ways ideal. Situated on the Sussex Downs, excellent training facilities were close at hand, while the sea at Bungalow Town afforded good bathing. Brighton and Worthing were both within easy distance, and were well patronized by all ranks when off duty.

While the situation of the camp was favourable to military training, the same cannot be said of all else. Training was throughout handicapped by the lack of rifles and other necessary equipment, but even so the companies—"A" under Major C. Bagnall, "B" under Major H. Walker-Leigh (and later under Captain L. H. P. Birch), "C" under Captain E. L. Mansfield, and "D" under Major H. Des Voeux—made rapid progress. This progress was largely due to a spirit of keen rivalry and competition that sprang up. Any accomplishment by "D" Company was rapidly followed by a further effort on the part of "A," "B," or "C" Companies, who were eager to show that the monopoly of military virtues was not confined to Mobb's immediate followers.

This feeling of rivalry at times became rather bitter, especially if by chance "D" Company received any issue in advance of other companies; but this spirit did not in its bitterest form outlive the early training, and it can be asserted without fear of contradiction that it was a battalion that left England a year later, and not four isolated companies.

During the year's training this rivalry did its work for the good of the battalion, and this work once done, the battalion, and not the company, became the unit.

The ranks of the battalion were being constantly drained to provide officers, and it was not long before E. R. Mobbs, D. Farrer, H. Grierson, C. H. Martyn, R. D. Howett, and S. C. Percival, all original members of "D" Company, were granted commissions in the battalion, while numerous other members were gazetted

B

to other units. In spite of this constant drain of personnel, there was, however, no difficulty in maintaining the numbers, and, indeed, it was found possible to discharge those who, through physical defects or for other reasons, were unlikely to make good soldiers ; and thus it was possible to maintain a high standard of fitness, while supplying a large number of officers from the battalion.

By the end of November, 1914, the condition of the camp, that had at first been favoured by good weather, had become impossible. Constant rain had reduced the grounds of Buckingham Park to a swamp. Even inside the tents the mud was inches deep, while between the tents and at the approaches of the camp the conditions were indescribably bad. The hutments under construction by McAlpine's firm were as yet unfinished, and, indeed, were far from completed. A change of quarters was imperative, and it was decided that the battalion should move into these uncompleted huts, which it did early in December. These huts, if dry—which was not always the case—were, however, unbearably cold ; not only were the windows and doors unfinished, but even the floor let in a cold draught. Moreover, the occupation of this camp by troops hindered the final completion of the camp, and so it was soon decided that a further move was necessary, and this time the battalion was ordered into billets.

The 7th Northhamptons were destined to pay two more short visits to Shoreham Camp before going abroad ; but it was not, however, without a twinge of sadness that they left a spot where they had spent nearly three months, and which had so many associations for them. Looking back, it is possible to realize how really enjoyable were those early Shoreham days, full as they were of discomforts and hardships.

## CHAPTER II

### SOUTHWICK AND REIGATE

ON leaving Shoreham Camp, the battalion marched to Southwick, a seaside village about four miles west of Brighton. The idea of being billeted in private houses was thoroughly appreciated by all ranks, but it was not as yet known how far these feelings would be reciprocated by the inhabitants of the place. The four company commanders or seconds-in-command were sent on to arrange the accommodation. These officers, assisted by the local police constable, found their task an easy one. Few, indeed, were the houses in this hospitable village that refused to supply a room. Each company was allotted one end of the village as its billeting area, and it was usually found possible to billet the company in one street, or two at the most ; and thus, though the whole battalion was spread over a fairly large area, each company was compact, and could turn out on parade at very short notice.

The village of Southwick, which had not then developed the shipyards that were built later, was prettily situated round a large village green. This green was utilized by the battalion for parades, and also for football grounds. An old village school was loaned to the battalion for use as an orderly-room, and here the Orderly Officer slept in case the battalion should receive urgent orders for a move or other excitements.

An effort was at first made to run a battalion officers' mess in Southwick, and thus carry on an institution that had been one of the chief features of the Shoreham days. The idea had, however, to be abandoned, and thus officers were compelled to feed in their billets with their hosts, and consequently saw



little of one another, unless they were in the same company and met on parades. The men, too, took their meals in their billets, and thus it came about that the company was rather looked on as the unit. This disadvantage, incident to the billeting system, was not really so serious as it might appear, as it enabled officers and men to get to know their companies. Training, too, was at present on the company or platoon system, and it was not till this was perfected that any training as a battalion could be commenced.

Some there were that considered that moving the battalion into billets would put back training, but this fear turned out to be unfounded. Training was carried on just as it had been at Shoreham; and the progress still held good. The Sussex Downs and local vacant spots afforded excellent entrenching grounds, and companies were soon busy digging themselves in. It is true that this early trench-digging did not always conform to the latest theories from France—*i.e.*, of wide traverses and no straight lines; but, after all, once all knew how to handle an entrenching tool, it only required active service conditions to enable a man to dig sufficient cover, as the battalion was to discover at Loos in September, 1915.

In this connection the following experience of a young officer may be recorded:—(Scene: Platoon digging.) Officer notices one man using pick different from the rest; considers majority must be right; says to offender, “Here, my man, this is how you want to use a pick,” shows him, and moves on, but not before he overhears the following:

“ . . . and to think I have been a . . . miner all my life ! ”

Exit officer hurriedly.

While Sunday mornings at Southwick were spent in church parades at the village church, Saturday mornings were usually spent in company or battalion route marches through Portslade to Brighton and back

along the sea front. These marches, which were led by the band that had been presented through the *Northampton Independent*, always attracted a good crowd of admirers, and had a considerable effect on local recruiting.

Four months were spent in billets at Southwick before the camp at Shoreham was fit for habitation, and it was not till early in April that the battalion returned to Shoreham. The stay of the battalion in Southwick had been longer than anyone had expected. The battalion, however, did not overstay its welcome, and the inhabitants gave it a truly enthusiastic send-off when the time came for it to return to Shoreham.

Little did anyone think, as the 7th Northamptons left Southwick, that the battalion was one day to be commanded by a native of the place, but such was indeed to be the case. The parents of Lieutenant-Colonel E. S. C. Grune, who was to command it during the final stages of the war, lived in Southwick, and from their house overlooking the green must oftentimes have watched the battalion on parade.

Southwick always occupied a warm corner in the hearts of the 7th Northamptons, and not a few of the girls of the village were afterwards to marry members of the battalion, and thus keep alive the associations for the place.

When the battalion returned to Shoreham and occupied huts on much the same spot as the first tents had stood in September, 1914, the camp was nearly completed ; and although the water arrangements and electric light fittings had not been completed, Shoreham in April, 1915, was a very different place from what it had been in December, 1914.

Battalion training had commenced, and it was essential that the battalion should be concentrated ; this had been the real cause of the move from Southwick. Battalion drill under Lieutenant-Colonel A. Parkin and the Adjutant was practised daily, both on the

parade ground in the camp, and also on the cricket field at Lancing College. At the latter place one particular morning's drill should not be forgotten. It was on this occasion that a certain Captain (later killed at Loos in September, 1915) afforded a much-needed humorous interlude when he repeatedly failed, in spite of written notes, to manoeuvre the battalion to the Adjutant's satisfaction.

During this period at Shoreham the battalion gradually received its equipment. The latest Service rifles were, indeed, only issued six weeks before the departure overseas, but leather equipment and certain technical stores were issued now. Lieutenant A. W. Heaton, after a course at Hythe, instructed a class in range-finding that spent many happy mornings on the beach at Bungalow Town. Lieutenant J. L. Urquhart, after obtaining the highest honours at Hythe, instructed a class in machine guns. The training of this class was, however, handicapped by the lack of sufficient guns—a defect that was in part made good by the originality of the battalion pioneers, who constructed the dummy shown in the photograph. This manufacture of piping and wood was not, however, quite self-contained, and depended on the assistance of a battalion drummer for the requisite noise!

The battalion signallers were meanwhile training under Lieutenant C. H. Martyn and the pioneers under Lieutenant A. O. Marshall.

While this specialist training was in progress the battalion was not idle, and field-days were held at regular intervals, one of which, near Steyning, is specially memorable.

It was on this occasion that a heated debate took place between the O.C. "D" Company and the acting O.C. "B" Company as to which had exterminated the other's company; and even though Captain L. H. P. Birch could have quoted the precedent of General Von Kluck, it seems probable that the flank march, as

carried out by "B" Company, was a somewhat dangerous move.

After less than a month the 7th Northhamptons were ordered to move to Reigate in order to work on the London defences that were being constructed in that neighbourhood.

The battalion marched to Reigate, where "A" and "B" Companies were billeted, and "C" and "D" Companies were billeted in Redhill. The trenches on which the 73rd Infantry Brigade were to work were situated on the reverse slope of the hill overlooking Reigate, and the march up that hill before and after work will be long remembered by those who participated in it. Not only was the battalion responsible for digging the defences, but it was also responsible for the guarding of them, and a permanent guard under an officer was always on the spot to prevent the approach of any undesirable visitors.

The spy craze was then at its height, and after listening to many tales of mysterious lights the Adjutant organized a regular spy hunt. At zero hour a large number of fleet runners turned out armed with sticks, and after listening to the Adjutant's prescribed signals set out in parties to scour the country.

Mysterious lights were traced to their origin, invariably a dining-room lamp; civilians were followed to their homes; while a noise purporting to resemble signalling in the Morse code was found on investigation to have been emitted by a peaceful cow!

After digging and guarding these trenches for a fortnight, the battalion was ordered back to Shoreham, while, after frantic appeals for a relief, the guard was withdrawn and the trenches were left without even a caretaker, so thoroughly, apparently, had the spy scare abated.

The battalion, after its march back to Shoreham, remained there a month before orders were received

for it to march to Woking, in order to join the Aldershot Command and fire its musketry practices.

Ranges had indeed been constructed in the Shoreham neighbourhood, but these, when nearly completed, were found unsafe, and were condemned.

This time it was to be " Good-bye " to Shoreham, and the battalion as a whole was not to revisit the place, though some individuals were to know it later as a hospital camp, while others were to visit the neighbourhood while on leave from France to renew acquaintance with their military nursery.



**DUMMY MACHINE GUN WITH DRUMMERS.**

*To face page 12*



## CHAPTER III

### WOKING

WOKING was reached by a route march that occupied two days. The break was made at Guildford, and the entry of the battalion into that town after a twenty-mile march in the hot sun was the subject of much praise from the inhabitants, who included many ex-Regular officers among their number. This march was headed by the brass band that the battalion now possessed, and which had made rapid progress under Drum-Major Allen, to whom the training, supervised by Lieutenant H. Grierson, had been entrusted.

The 7th Northhamptons had so far in their history been accommodated in tents, huts, and billets, but the occupation of furnished barracks was a new departure. The Inkerman Barracks, in pre-war days the station for one infantry battalion, were divided between the 7th Northhamptons and the 9th Royal Sussex, another battalion of the 73rd Infantry Brigade.

The barrack buildings themselves were not beautiful, and accommodation for the two battalions was naturally not too ample. Woking as a station had, however, its advantages. It possessed an excellent parade ground, of which the Adjutant took full advantage, and it was, moreover, within easy reach of the famous Century Butts at Bisley.

Early morning battalion drill under the Adjutant became the chief feature in the training of the "Northampton Guards," as the battalion had been nicknamed on account of the Guards' habits introduced by Captain Paget and the first R.S.M., himself a Guardsman.

The proximity of the Bisley ranges was, however, the chief reason for the battalion's move to Woking,



and it was thus not long before the battalion settled down to firing their musketry courses under Captain H. Wright, an extremely energetic brigade musketry officer. The weather was not propitious for high individual scores, though some were made ; but the general level was undoubtedly a high one, as was to be expected from a battalion that was rapidly developing the traditions of the 48th and 58th Foot.

Once these musketry courses were completed, the battalion had completed its training, and its departure for overseas was only a question of days. Field-Marshal Earl Kitchener, K.G., K.P., G.C.B., O.M., G.C.S.I., G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., inspected the 24th Division on August 12th, and, in spite of his arrival synchronizing with a downpour of rain, he expressed himself delighted with the soldierly appearance of these New Army battalions.

The 24th Division was one of a group that were being reserved for offensive operations, and so it happened that it was not sent abroad immediately, but the intervening time was spent on realistic training on Chobham Common. This training, which took the nature of trench construction and trench attack, was carried out under active service conditions, and, thanks to the presence in the battalion of Regular officers like Captain O'Brien, M.C., and Lieutenant Wyatt, who had returned from active service, the battalion greatly benefited by this week's training, during which it was inspected by T.M. the King and Queen and the Princess Mary.

The trenches as constructed at Chobham bore little resemblance to those the battalion had dug previously near the Shoreham Waterworks or on the downs at Southwick.

The day the 24th Division, commanded by Sir John Ramsey, K.C.B., received its orders for France was, as can be imagined, a day of real rejoicing. Nearly a year had been spent in its preliminary training, whereas

in 1914 it was expected that three to six months would see the battalions overseas. This feeling of expectancy had given rise to many rumours; definite dates for departure had been circulated countless times, and had yet always found credence somewhere. Various theatres of war had been favoured. The arrival of solar topees for two officers gave rise to an Egyptian theory that found many supporters. Others believed India was the destination; others professed to believe that Kitchener of Khartoum had quite forgotten the 24th Division, or that he was reserving them to send abroad *apres la guerre* to fill in trenches.

The 7th Northhamptons, as they were over strength, sent a contingent of men to other battalions, while, much to the disappointment of all concerned, a party of twenty subalterns was dispatched to the 8th Reserve Battalion to form a reserve to reinforce the 7th Battalion when required. Major J. W. Fisher joined the battalion shortly before it sailed, while Major C. Bagnall, the beloved O.C. of "A" Company, was found by a Medical Board only fit for home service, as also was Major R. J. Bentinck, who had been so popular while in command of "B" Company. The loss of these two officers, who had done so much for the 7th Battalion, was felt by everyone, and the respect in which they were regarded was shown in the enthusiastic send-off they received from the battalion prior to their departure.

The last night spent in Inkerman Barracks was celebrated by a concert given by the Sergeants' Mess, to which the officers were invited. This concert, which was ably conducted by R.S.M. Carter, was a tremendous success, and that last night in England certainly forms one of the landmarks in the history of the battalion that was at last to proceed to France to demonstrate to the Germans that if England in 1914 was unprepared for war and was yet invincible, the British Army had powers of expansion hitherto undreamed of,

and that these powers would be utilized until the military automatons of Prussia besought peace on any terms.

The recruits of 1914 had been hardly tried in many ways, but the ordeal by battle was yet to come.

## CHAPTER IV

### ORDEAL BY BATTLE

THE transport and machine-gun sections were the first representatives of the battalion to leave Inkerman Barracks, Woking, proceeding on August 31st, via Southampton, to Havre.

The remainder of the battalion, reduced to exact establishment strength, entrained at Brookwood on September 1st, after a wait of two hours in the rain at the station.

On arrival at Folkestone, the battalion embarked at once and sailed to Boulogne, arriving in the early hours of September 2nd. In spite of the effects of a Channel crossing, the battalion gave a fine display of march discipline as it swung through the darkened streets *en route* for a camp on the hill outside the town, and the inhabitants crowded to their doors and windows to give a hearty welcome to their new visitors. The stay at Boulogne was, however, short, and after a few hours' rest the battalion marched down and entrained for its billeting area. The train journey, though not long, was a good specimen of travelling on the French railway service in war time, and it was many hours before the battalion completed a comparatively short journey. The destination was at last reached, apparently miles from anywhere; but it was, however, with real relief that, after a mile's march, the transport section was sighted at its rendezvous, and a hot meal was found ready prepared.

The billeting area was not reached till nightfall, when "A" and "B" Companies were accommodated in Crequy, and "C" and "D" Companies and

Headquarters at Torey, two small villages about four miles from Fruges.

These villages, typical of many in the North of France, struck the battalion at once as different from those of England. The quaint farmhouses, with the manure-heap in front of the door, were soon to become too common for notice, but it was this undoubtedly that first struck the newcomers.

The battalion were the first British troops that had been billeted in that area, and the inhabitants had not suffered as yet from all the inconveniences of increased population suddenly thrust upon them, and welcomed their British visitors with open arms. As was to be expected, the prices of such limited commodities as could be purchased in shop or estaminet soon rose as the tales of the fabulous wealth, always ascribed to the Britisher abroad, got about; but the battalion could always look back on the three weeks spent in this neighbourhood with kindly recollections and gratitude.

The aged curé of Crequy was typical of the hospitable villagers, who did all they could to make their visitors comfortable.

The stay in this neighbourhood was longer than had been anticipated, and it was with real relief that the battalion heard from a General Staff Officer (Lieutenant-Colonel Stuart) that the 24th Division was soon to take part in the greatest battle of the war. Hopes rang high as the officers and N.C.Os. listened to this officer's forecast of the battle and the part the Division was to take. "Push on, push on! When you can literally go no farther, others will come through you and continue the work." Such was the advice given, and it was felt that the end was already in sight. The dull roll of distant gunfire could already be heard in these peaceful villages, and on September 21st the battalion commenced its march in the direction of the firing. It had been anticipated that the battalion might be

rushed up in buses to the battle, and embussing and debussing had been practised until it had been reduced to a military art. It was thus rather a disappointment when it was learnt that the journey was to be undertaken on foot.

The march to the Battle of Loos occupied four days, and was undertaken with the greatest secrecy. All movement was confined to the period of darkness, and not even smoking was permitted for fear that a hostile aircraft would discover the impending concentration. The first stay was made at the village of Laire, and there the battalion lay hid during the daylight, to proceed at night to the next stay at L'Eclème, and from thence a further night march was made to Beuvry (two miles west of Bethune). At this last place the majority of the battalion bivouacked in a ploughed field beside a battery of heavy guns, whose ceaseless firing prevented any sleep.

The din of battle was now quite close, and further orders were awaited with impatience. At 11.15 a.m. on September 25th these orders were received, and the battalion moved off nearly at once to Vermelles, where it was to receive further instruction from the Brigade Major (Major Drew, I.A.). The preliminary march along the Lens—Bethune road, conducted with intervals of 100 yards between companies, was uneventful; only one shell fell near the battalion, and that obligingly failed to explode. Vermelles was reached without incident of any kind, and there the battalion halted amid the ruins. Another battalion of the 73rd Infantry Brigade had meanwhile disappeared, and it was already getting dark before the battalion left Vermelles to join the 9th Division, to which the 73rd Infantry Brigade had been allotted.

The final stage to the Battle of Loos lay across the Le Rutoire Plain, which by this time was thickly dotted with batteries in action. Desultory sniping was going on, and it was eventually decided to leave

the transport section behind a hedge with the battle reserve of officers. This position which was taken up by the transport soon became too unhealthy, and great credit was due to Captain R. C. Fowler for the skilful way he extricated his transport section from a very difficult situation. Other battalions were not so successful with their transport, and, though exaggerated tales circulated in the Division, it is, however, a fact that one battalion captured in the final advance of 1918 a field kitchen that it had lost in the Loos Battle of 1915.

A description of the battle would be beyond the scope of this book, if it were not itself impossible. Suffice it to say that the battalion found itself eventually in the Hohenzollern Redoubt, when it was nearly at once counter-attacked by the Germans, but retained possession of the old main German defences, from which, in spite of repeated effort for three days, the enemy were unable to dislodge it.

At one period of the fighting Lieutenant A. W. Heaton, with a machine-gun team, found himself on the top of Fosse 8, but they were not alone there, and his descent was certainly accomplished with greater rapidity than his toilsome climb. Captain D. Farrer was at one moment actually inside Loos village, where he succeeded in silencing a hostile sniper that was located in a chimney. The battalion was, indeed, spread over a wide area, and owing to the facts that all were new to such warfare and the impossibility of receiving direct orders or even maps from higher authority (who were themselves in the same difficulty), considerable uncertainty ensued, which was only alleviated by the personal heroism and enthusiasm of all ranks. At one period during the first night "B" Company, at any rate, finding themselves in a deep trench, and fired at from both sides, without any exact knowledge of their whereabouts, cut the Gordian knot of uncertainty by placing the







*Photo :Ripley, Southwick.]*

MEMBERS OF "D" COY., SEPTEMBER, 1914.

*To face page 21.*

men to face opposite directions. This was, however, only accomplished by means of each man standing on his pack and any other article he could find to enable him to see over the top of the trench. Morning, however, solved the mystery, and demonstrated that it was another battalion of the 73rd Infantry Brigade that had been firing into the parados of the trench, in the belief that they were the foremost British troops.

The battalion was subjected to almost incessant counter-attacks, the most serious of which was that launched on the early morning of the 27th. At 11 p.m. on that day the battalion was, however, relieved, though it was some time before the survivors could be collected in some old trenches at Sailly la Bourse under Captain R. C. Fowler.

The casualties had been heavy in numbers, but numbers alone do not represent the seriousness of the loss to the battalion. Lieutenant-Colonel A. Parkin, who as Commanding Officer had trained the battalion, had been shot through the head and killed instantaneously. Captain V. D. Shortt, Lieutenant L. L. Phipps, both of whom had already been wounded earlier in the battle, were killed; Lieutenant J. L. Urquhart and Lieutenant J. H. Morley were reported missing and wounded, and there can now be no doubt that they were both killed on the field of battle. What the battalion owed to these officers cannot be expressed in words, but those who served under them or with them cannot hear the Battle of Loos mentioned without recalling their characters to memory with love and pride.

Captain T. G. Paget (Adjutant), Major J. W. Fisher, Captain E. L. Mansfield, Lieutenant A. O. Marshall, 2nd-Lieutenant C. F. Saunders, were wounded and evacuated, while, though wounded, Captain E. R. Mobbs and Captain D. N. Farrer refused to be evacuated, and remained at duty.

The casualties amounted to 402 all ranks, and

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included very many of the best of the battalion, and it was not long before rumour reached Northampton that the battalion had been "wiped out," causing, as such rumours are bound to do, unnecessary suffering and anxiety. The battle was, indeed, a hard blow for the 7th Northhamptons, and one was justified in wondering on September 28th if the battalion could ever recover its old spirit. It is perhaps in a sense true that it never did, but it is undoubtedly true that from that date the 7th Northhamptons never went back. The losses, though great, had been compensated by other gains. The spirit that animated the survivors was sufficient, not only to carry them on to victory, but also to inspire the men who came out to fill up the gap. The battalion, in spite of difficulties and losses undreamed of, lack of food, water, and ammunition, ignorance as to orders, want of sleep and rest, had not only survived its ordeal by battle, but had proved itself unconquerable. All felt that they had started with the hardest task, and on completing that felt confident for any future task. Heavier casualties, severer shelling, other difficulties were, indeed, in front of the battalion ; but, looking back, one is tempted to think that, in spite of the horrors of the Somme in 1916, Ypres in 1917, and the St. Quentin battle of 1918, the Battle of Loos in 1915, from its very newness to all ranks, was the severest trial that the 7th Northamptonshire Regiment was called on to face during the four years' constant fighting in France and Flanders.

## CHAPTER V

### WINTER OF 1915

THE last survivors had hardly rejoined before the battalion paraded under Captain R. C. Fowler, who, as senior officer present, took over command from Captain E. R. Mobbs, who had commanded on the field, and marched to Noeux les Mines station and entrained.

The battalion had lost the greater part of its equipment in the battle, as all packs had been used as firing steps in the newly captured trenches. Many of the men had lost their service caps and were wearing cap comforters on their heads, and thus presented a curious appearance as they marched to the station. After detraining at Berguette the battalion marched about six miles to Norrent-Fontes. After a few hours' rest a further short march brought the battalion to Lambres (about three miles south of Aire), where it was billeted.

At Lambres Major H. W. Compton, of the 12th Royal Fusiliers, was sent to take over command of the battalion. After three days spent in reorganization, the battalion entrained for Godewaersvelde, and marched thence via Steenvoorde to Herzele.

Soon after the arrival of the battalion at this village Major P. C. B. Skinner, D.S.O., Northamptonshire Regiment, arrived and assumed command, and strenuous efforts were made to get the battalion rested and refitted.

As so many units had suffered equally in the late battle, it was no easy matter to refit at once, but all that could be done was done under the guidance of Lieutenant-Colonel P. C. B. Skinner. When Major-General J. Capper, C.B., on assuming command of the

24th Division, inspected the battalion on October 4th, he informed the battalion how pleased he was to find a unit of the Northamptonshire Regiment in his command, as his family had close connections with the Regiment. He was, however, distressed to find that the battalion had suffered so severely, and that so little could be done in the way of immediate re-equipment. (On this occasion one officer at least was wearing a cap improvised from a cap comforter.) With Lieutenant-Colonel Skinner as O.C. and Major-General Capper as G.O.C., however, this difficulty of equipment was soon overcome. After a couple of days at Herzele the battalion marched to Watou billeting area, where it remained only a few days before it marched to Reninghelst.

It had been decided that the 73rd Infantry Brigade, now under the command of Brigadier-General R. G. Jelf, D.S.O., K.R.R., was to take over a section of the trench system in front of the village of St. Eloi, and thus on arrival at Reninghelst parties of officers and N.C.Os. commenced to reconnoitre the sector. The companies were now commanded as under :—

" A " Company	...	Captain H. Grierson,
" B " Company	...	Lieutenant H. B. King,
" C " Company	...	Lieutenant A. H. Fynn,
" D " Company	...	Captain D. Farrer,

with Captain E. R. Mobbs as Adjutant and Second-in-Command, and Captain R. C. Fowler as Brigade Transport Officer.

The battalion relieved a battalion of the Durham Light Infantry on the evening of October 14th, and commenced tours of seven days in the line and seven days out in camp behind while the 13th Middlesex Regiment held the trenches.

This sector, that earlier in the year had been the scene of heavy fighting, in which the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry and the Rifle Brigade had lost

heavily, was considered at that time a comparatively quiet sector. The chief anxiety the battalion suffered was from trench mortars, to which form of frightfulness everyone was new ; but after a few days in which to accustom themselves to the peculiarities of this method of destruction, everyone settled down to constructive work on the trenches and to build much-needed shelters.

Mining activity was great on both sides, and many hours were spent by all emptying spoil bags from the shafts into shell-holes and pits, in order that the mine-heads should not be visible to the enemy owing to heaps of chalk. As this work could only be done at night, it was no easy matter to keep pace with the rate at which the underground miners brought the spoil to the surface, and the mining officers could be seen almost daily in the Headquarters of the front line companies imploring the O.C. to put more men on this job the next night. There was, however, much other work to be done. The rain was bringing down the parapets, and the trenches themselves were deep in chalky slush, and the battalion was kept busy day and night when in the line on these repairs.

Situated behind the support line on the Voormezele—St. Eloi road lay the remains of an estaminet known to most of the France B.E.F. as “ Bus-House ” (so called because the Canadians had once taken a motor bus thus far, but no farther).

This house, then but a skeleton, contained an iron safe which had so far baffled all efforts at opening it, and thus, in spite of the fact that the house was in full view by day of the German lines, and was the favourite calibrating point for their heavy artillery, efforts were made almost daily by members of the support company to force this safe ; no success, however, attended their efforts, which were thus suspended.

One of the chief frequenters of Bus House was 2nd-Lieutenant S. C. Percival, who had joined the battalion as a private and later been given a commis-

sion ; he left the battalion soon after this with a transfer to the R.E. services.

The spell in the St. Eloi sector was on the whole generally uneventful, though the experience of what has been called "peace-warfare" was new to all. When not holding the line, the battalion was back a few miles in camps between Vlamertinghe and Reninghelst, and spent its nights on R.E. working parties in or near the line. One incident of this period must, however, not pass unrecorded.

On October 27th the whole battalion, then in reserve, marched to Reninghelst for a hot bath at the newly opened divisional baths. The battalion had been in France and Flanders by now nearly two months, but this was the first definitely official bath that they had had, though efforts had, of course, been made periodically to provide hot water in billets and in camp.

These baths, at which clean underclothing was provided, were always a great blessing to the troops, as they returned begrimed from the trenches, and were always one of the chief concerns of the divisional staff on a move to a new area.

On the same day as the battalion indulged in this luxury of a hot bath a representative contingent paraded in Reninghelst to form part of a composite battalion to be inspected by His Majesty the King, who addressed the troops near the church at that village, in spite of the fact that the village was shelled periodically, as the church tower bore witness. This inspection took place only a day or two before His Majesty's accident when he was thrown from his horse not far from this place.

Before the battalion left the St. Eloi sector, an ever-memorable two days of the reserve period was spent in the village of Dickebusch, in order to be close at hand for any working parties that might be required. The battalion was shelled fairly heavily as it marched into Dickebusch, and suffered a few casualties, but in

spite of constant shelling of the village itself the battalion was very fortunate, one barn receiving a direct hit just after a platoon of men had vacated the spot.

On November 22nd the battalion was at last relieved, after many false rumours and consequent disappointment, and the whole division proceeded to the neighbourhood of St. Omer to take its place as part of the General Headquarter's reserve.

The journey thither was conducted by route march, the first stage being to Eecke, near Steenvoorde, a distance of about nine miles. After one night at Eecke the battalion marched to Arneke, about twelve miles distant, passing over Cassel Hill, where was situated the Headquarters of the 2nd Army, under General Plumer. The march up this hill, coming as it did just before the hourly halt was due, was in itself as good as a week's training, when it is remembered that since the march to the Battle of Loos the division had done very little hard marching, but had spent many weeks in muddy trenches, with its consequent danger of swollen feet.

The journey to the rest area was completed on the third day, when the battalion marched into the village of Eperlecques, situated about six miles north-west of St. Omer, at that time the General Headquarters of the British Army.

The village of Eperlecques, though not large, provided sufficient accommodation for Brigade Headquarters and the 7th Northhamptons, and it was not long before everyone had settled in for a good rest and hard training.

Systematic inspections were undertaken, and training was soon commenced in earnest both for the battalion as a whole and also for the various specialists—viz., Lewis gunners, signallers, bombers.

On December 2nd the first allotment of leave for England was given to the battalion, and six other ranks proceeded for a period of eight days. This



allotment, though only a small one and continued at irregular intervals, did more than anything else to raise the moral of all ranks. When for any reason "leave" was cancelled, not only those due became disheartened, but also those whose turn could not come round for many months.

This fact was later appreciated by the Higher Command, and it was noticeable that during the latter months of the war leave, though reduced, was never cancelled, and thus hope still burned in the heart of even one who had but just returned from "Blighty."

No one who has not experienced the joys of "leave" can picture the excitement and relief conjured up by the very name, and he who has enjoyed it will need no reminder or eulogism on the subject.

During the time spent at Eperlecques the battalion was inspected by the Army Commander and others of the Higher Command, while Sir Douglas Haig visited the village and inspected a company training and had a few words with the troops. Brigade field days were carried out in the neighbourhood of the Forêt d'Eperlecques, and every effort was made to increase the efficiency of the battalion. Sports of all kinds usually took place in the afternoon, and an inter-company football competition was arranged, which was won by "D" Company after a hard struggle.

It soon became probable that the Division would spend its first Christmas in France at rest, and arrangements were made to celebrate the event in fitting style. Purchases of cigars, oranges, and beer, etc., were made from the profits of the battalion canteen, and these were supplemented by gifts from the inhabitants of Northampton and its neighbourhood, sent out through the *Northampton Independent* by W. H. Holloway, Esq.

It may be stated here that throughout the four years abroad no regiment could have been better supported by its home people than was the Northamptonshire Regiment, and the 7th Battalion owed a

special debt of gratitude to the editor and supporters of the *Northampton Independent* for the generosity with which they helped "Mobbs' Corps" on all possible occasions.

It was not possible to arrange a central dinner on Christmas Day, but each company arranged its own celebrations, though a race of 100 yards for a wager between the oldest member of the battalion and a somewhat ponderous company quartermaster-sergeant attracted almost universal attention.

On Boxing Day the long-expected orders for a new move arrived, and it was understood that the 24th Division was to take over the northern sector of the British front near Pilkem. This order was, however, cancelled, and a further week's respite was allowed before orders were received that the division was to take over the already famous sector across the Ypres—Menin road at Hooge.

Prior to the move of the division from the rest area, Lieutenant-Colonel P. C. B. Skinner, D.S.O., took over command of the 73rd Infantry Brigade during the absence of Brigadier-General R. A. Jelf on leave, and Major E. R. Mobbs assumed command of the battalion.

The battalion had enjoyed the longest rest it was destined to have until after the Armistice, and had profited considerably by the training that it had undergone. Considerable reinforcements of officers and men had been received during this period. Christmas, 1915, had seen the enthusiastic recruits of Christmas, 1914, developed into war-tried veterans.

## CHAPTER VI

### HOOGE

ON January 7th, 1916, the battalion left the rest billets at Eperlecques and marched to St. Omer, and en-trained for Poperinghe in Belgium. After a four-hours' journey in the train, Quintin Station was reached, and the battalion, marching through Poperinghe, occupied a camp two miles south-east of the town. This camp consisted of wooden Nissen huts on either side of a by-road ; these huts were in a poor state of repair when the battalion took them over, and in order to encourage improvements Major E. R. Mobbs, then in command, offered a prize next day for the platoon that made the best improvements. This prize was won by a platoon of " A " Company.

As the Ypres salient was always a temptation for a sudden attack by the Germans, and it was necessary for even reserve troops to be prepared at all times for a sudden move, a system of practice " Stand to " was instituted, and during the stay in this salient the troops were repeatedly called on to fall in suddenly at any hour of the day or night, and after inspection were dismissed. These alarms were commenced soon after the arrival of the battalion in this area, and the rapidity with which the troops fell in in fighting order never failed to receive the commendation of the authorities.

After a few days in this camp the battalion received orders to take up its position in the dug-outs behind the Bund at Zillebeke, an artificial lake that supplied Ypres with water.

These dug-outs, though not at that time proof from shells, were so situated behind a steep bank that it was difficult for the enemy to obtain direct hits on

them, though the vicinity was shelled daily. It was no uncommon sight to see men, after the shelling had temporarily ceased, peering into the lake in search of fish that had been stunned by shells falling into the water, and quite large bream and other fish were secured in this manner.

During the stay at that place the battalion was chiefly occupied in working parties, and Gordon Farm, a ruined house about one mile distant, became the recognized rendezvous for infantry working parties and R.E. taskmasters. This farm, which was also a large R.E. dump for stores, was by no means a healthy locality, and the name conjures up, along with Hell Fire Corner, The Culvert, Transport Farm, and other resorts, memories not unmixed with respect in those whose business it was to visit these spots under cover of darkness.

After previous reconnaissance, the battalion, on January 19th, moved into the front line near Hooge without incident, having the heaped remains of the famous racing stables of Hooge between their lines and that occupied by the enemy.

It was round these ruins that the chief incidents of this period centred, affording as they did excellent cover for a sudden raid by either side, and nearly every night bombing encounters took place in this locality. The battalion bombing squad, under Lieutenant Hadley, however, soon established their superiority over the enemy.

These trenches, which had in August, 1915, been captured from the 14th Division, and later been retaken by the 6th Division, had been the scene of very heavy fighting, and the ground was covered with the dead of both sides, which made systematic work on the trenches exceedingly difficult. The enemy had, moreover, from his higher ground a complete view of the British line, and, indeed, right up to Ypres, so that all movement and work was necessarily confined to the

night. This enforced idleness by day added to the likelihood of cloud gas attacks whenever the wind was favourable, the appalling state of the trenches, and the almost continuous hammering by hostile artillery made the apex of the Ypres salient the most trying sector on the British front at any time, but especially trying during the winter months of early 1916, when it was known that the enemy was preparing for an attack. This attack took place near the Bluff at the end of February, and was south of the sector held by the 24th Division; but the 24th Division, especially the 3rd Rifle Brigade, suffered heavily in the preliminary bombardments on a much wider front.

After a tour of four to six days in the front line, the battalion usually marched back to Ypres along the Menin road in the gum-boots they had worn in the line, and deposited them in a cellar near the old ramparts at Ypres, and then proceeded to the west end of the town, where they partook of hot soup in a soup-kitchen in the ruined asylum.

This asylum, situated as it was in view from the Pilkem Ridge, was no place to linger at, and after collecting the battalion, companies moved off to a camp behind Vlamertinghe either by road or on some occasions by train. This latter method, introduced in order to prevent the men walking too far with their swollen feet, always had about it a delightful sense of adventure.

The line ran up nearly to the asylum through Vlamertinghe to Poperinghe, and on a still night the noise of the train could be heard by the enemy, who usually shelled the line at some spot or other. It is probable that on these occasions the engine-drivers of the R.O.D. service put up ever new records for the Ypres—Vlamertinghe course, just as the infantry ration parties and working parties were always reducing the record for the course between Hooge and Hell Fire Corner.

About the middle of February the 24th Division sidestepped a short way north, and occupied some trenches in front of Railway Wood. These trenches were not much better than those at Hooge, but the accommodation was slightly better, and the mining shafts under Railway Wood itself afforded perfectly safe cover for a reserve company.

The northern sub-sector of the battalion front was a particularly unpleasant one to hold. The trench known as "A 1" ran directly towards the German lines, and was consequently enfiladed by rifles and rifle grenades. The trench, moreover, could not be approached by day at all, as it was impossible to construct a communication trench from Railway Wood.

An additional disadvantage of this trench was the fact that at night the enemy were in the habit of bringing up a naval gun mounted on a train not far behind their lines and firing on these trenches, which received many direct hits in this manner. As there was no shelter in this trench proof even against a field gun, this additional attention was far from welcome, and "A 1" trench acquired a wholly unenviable reputation.

While in this sector of the front the battalion sustained a severe loss in the person of its Intelligence Officer (2nd-Lieutenant I. H. Stevenson), who failed to return from a patrol in No Man's Land one night.

On March 1st the battalion, then in reserve, received orders to hold itself in readiness to support the attack the 3rd Division was going to make to recover the lost trenches at the Bluff, and moved up to the dug-outs at Zillebeke. On arrival at this place, it was found that this position had been heavily shelled since the battalion was there last, and that many of the shelters had been destroyed. The larger dug-outs previously occupied as Headquarters for the 73rd Infantry Brigade had been destroyed, and Brigade Headquarters were compelled to move to new quarters in the Ypres Ramparts.

Besides constant shelling with howitzers and field guns, the place was now shelled repeatedly with gas shells, and the battalion was kept busy erecting gas-proof curtains to the main dug-outs.

The battalion was not required to assist the 3rd Division, and a week later moved into the Hooze trenches and relieved the 2nd Leinster Regiment. Snow had been falling for several days, and the trenches defied description. During the former tour in this sector it had not been possible to move by day, and now, owing to the deep mud and slush, movement by night also was nearly impossible, and conditions generally were such as were only possible in the Ypres salient in winter.

On March 9th a determined bombing attack was made on the trench near the Hooze Stables, which was repulsed, after casualties had been inflicted on both sides, by the arrival of Sergeant Brookman and his bombing squad. On this occasion one man of the battalion received no less than seventeen distinct wounds, none of which were, however, serious. Private Boyles, of "B" Company, the father of eight small children, was killed on this occasion after doing splendid work with his rifle.

On March 18th the 24th Division moved farther south to take up a position at the foot of the Messines Ridge.

Two and a half months had been spent in the Hooze area, and the battalion had suffered heavily. The chief difficulty in that area had been the fact that even when not holding the line the troops in reserve in camp were still under shell fire, and were also subjected to a periodical bombing from the air. The actual holding the line was one of the lesser evils of the salient; the chief difficulties lay in reaching the trenches and leaving them.

The communication trenches, such as Grafton Street and Regent Street, were under direct observation by

day from the enemy, and any work done on them by night was certain to receive attention from the enemy as soon as it was light ; while the main approach lay along the Ypres—Menin road, which was swept by machine-gun and artillery fire continuously during the night.

Even the town of Poperinghe, situated about ten miles from Hooze, which was visited by the troops when in reserve, was also shelled and bombed, and thus the Ypres Salient acquired a reputation throughout the British Expeditionary Force that could not be rivalled elsewhere on the British front.

A word must be said here with regard to the transport section. An idea has become prevalent that because the transport section of a battalion did not hold the line with the rest of the infantry that their job was an easier one. From what has been said, however, of the difficulties of the salient, it will be evident that the work of the transport under such conditions was far from easy, or even safe. Every night at the same hour the transport had to leave its camp and bring up supplies of R.E. material, water, and food, and pass through the ruined streets of Ypres and the Menin Gate on their way to the battalion dump near Hell Fire Corner.

Not only were the roads, that could not be avoided, under shell fire, but they were also packed with transport of other units and gun-limbers travelling in both directions, and progress was necessarily slow and wearisome. Never once during these trying months did Lieutenant R. D. Howett with his section fail to deliver supplies at the appointed rendezvous, and this record was no mean one, nor was it secured without loss ; but the fact that casualties to men and horses were so few proves the skill with which this section did their onerous if not showy work.

At the end of February Lieutenant-Colonel P. C. B. Skinner had taken over temporary command of the



73rd Infantry Brigade, and Major E. R. Mobbs had assumed command of the 7th Northamptons. While in command of the Brigade, Lieutenant-Colonel Skinner was later admitted to hospital, and never rejoined the battalion. This officer had done great work for the battalion in training both the officers and men. On assuming command soon after the Battle of Loos he had found the battalion ill-equipped and dependent on inexperienced company commanders, whom he at once set about to train, and the display of the 7th Northamptons during the difficult months in the salient demonstrated the success that attended those efforts.

No officer could have considered the men under his command more thoughtfully, or have been more highly respected, than Lieutenant-Colonel P. C. B. Skinner, and his loss to the battalion was a very real one. After returning from hospital he was given command of the 41st Infantry Brigade, and later commanded the 14th Division, in which capacity he saw the end of the war.

It had been evident to those who saw the early days of the 7th Northamptons that if he lived Major E. R. Mobbs would one day command the battalion he had done so much to raise. After his display of military ability and leadership at the Battle of Loos this became even more evident, and when Lieutenant-Colonel Skinner left the battalion, no one was more fitted than Major E. R. Mobbs to take command. This fact was not immediately recognized by the higher authority and senior officers were periodically sent to take command; but owing to the support of the Brigadier (General Jelf) and the Divisional Commander (General Capper), the battalion remained in the hands of Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs, who had been trained for this command as second-in-command to Lieutenant-Colonel Skinner.

The Ypres Salient was vacated by the 24th Division

with little regret. The Division had held it during the difficult winter months and in face of the threatening attitude of the enemy, who always cast envying eyes on Ypres, and the message of appreciation that the Division received from the G.O.C. Second Army showed that its efforts had been realized and appreciated by those in authority.

## CHAPTER VII

### MESSINES, 1916

ON leaving Hooze the 24th Division marched via Westoutre and Berthen to relieve the 1st Canadian Division in the line in front of Messines. After spending a couple of days in the neighbourhood of the defences of Mount Kemmel, the battalion on March 24th relieved the 15th Battalion Canadian Highlanders in the line near Wulverghem.

The outgoing unit, that had occupied that sector for nearly nine months, assured the battalion that the sector was really quiet, and reported that there was no such thing as a "No Man's Land," as their patrols were in possession right up to the German lines.

On taking over the new sector the battalion was at once struck with the excellence of the wire entanglements in front of the line; but on further examination it was found that the wire in front of the old Canadian front, good as it was when compared to what was possible at Ypres, was indeed poor in comparison with that in front of the enemy's lines.

On March 25th, the day following the relief of the Canadians, the enemy shelled the new front heavily, including Fort Osborne, a series of sand-bagged dug-outs occupied by a support company. As the outgoing unit had declared that the enemy was ignorant of the existence of these shelters, it was certainly disconcerting to have them shelled before the battalion had been there 24 hours. This bombardment was continued on the next day, and it was estimated in the Battalion Intelligence Summary that no less than 1,000 shells fell on the sector occupied by the battalion during these two days.

After a tour of eight days in the line, the battalion was relieved by the 2nd Leinster Regiment, and returned to Brigade reserve in a camp known as Red Lodge, situated on the western edge of Ploegsteert Wood.

This camp, which consisted of a farm-building and a few old French wooden huts, was most delightfully situated from an artistic point of view on the wooded slopes of Hill 63. It was not, however, a health resort, as every time the battalion occupied the camp it was shelled heavily once, if not more often, during the time spent there. Other battalions seemed more fortunate, but the 7th Northhamptons suffered a few casualties nearly every time they stopped there.

When in reserve, the nights, as usual, were occupied in working parties just behind the front line.

After every other tour in the line, a battalion returned to divisional reserve and occupied some huts at Kortepyp, about one and a half miles west of Neuve Eglise. This camp was not nearly so picturesquely situated as that at Red Lodge, but it had the advantage of not being shelled, and troops there were, moreover, not called out for so many working parties as those found when in Brigade reserve.

This sector of the front was particularly favourable for cloud gas attacks, and though none had been inflicted on the Canadians, elaborate precautions were taken to guard against any evil effects of such an attack. The battalion was still equipped with the P.H. helmets that had superseded the cotton-waste gags issued for the Battle of Loos ; but as these P.H. helmets could not be used satisfactorily if it was necessary to give orders or receive a telephone message, an issue of large box helmets known as P.H.G. was made to signallers, Lewis gunners, and others who specially required them. These helmets, which allowed a certain liberty for speech, were, however, too bulky for those who had to move about much, and the

majority preferred the old bag-like P.H. helmet with its hideous valve mouthpiece.

On April 30th, at 12.45 a.m., the 2nd Leinster Regiment became conscious that a cloud gas attack was being launched, accompanied as the attack was by the firing of a number of German machine guns to conceal the noise of the emptying gas cylinders. The Northamptons were in Brigade Reserve at Red Lodge, and were shelled at the same time. The order was received to "Stand to," and man some defences known as the Cavalry Trenches, but at 4 a.m. the order was received to "Stand down," as it was evident that no attack was contemplated.

During the absence of Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs on leave, Captain H. Grierson assumed command of the battalion, and during this period the battalion was visited by a contingent of the Royal Navy, some of whom spent a most instructive twenty-four hours in the front line in a trench known as "C 2"—a trench that for design and comfort would have compared favourably with any on the British front. The other sub-sector of the battalion front was not so fortunate, being composed of trenches known as "141" and "142." These trenches were constantly enfiladed by a battery of German 5.9 guns, and no work could be done on them without attracting the attention of the enemy.

Major-General J. Capper, commanding the 24th Division, was apparently one of the few who really appreciated these trenches, as he could be found most days wandering along this line or examining the lines opposite, much to the annoyance of the O.C. Company who resided there.

The tenure of this sector of the line was generally uneventful until June 17th, when shortly after midnight the enemy launched a cloud gas attack on this front. It so happened that the front lines were thickly held on this night, as the 7th Australian Brigade

were taking over the sector next day, and several of their officers and N.C.Os. were reconnoitring the front. Working parties from the support company were also engaged in the trench, yet, in spite of the fact that the line was held so much thicker than usual, and in spite of a heavy bombardment of every kind of shell and trench mortar, the total casualties were only one officer wounded (Lieutenant E. G. Passmore), seven other ranks killed, and fifty-three wounded, which number included certain of the Australian force.

This gas attack practically missed " 141 " and " 142 " trenches, where gas helmets were soon discarded ; but Battalion Headquarters, situated about 500 yards in rear of these trenches, owing to the fact that they were located in a valley, were compelled to wear their gas helmets for about two hours.

This gas attack demonstrated the serviceability of the P.H. helmets against the existing German gases, and the helmet hitherto regarded rather as an inartistic piece of kit was thenceforth treated with respect second only to the rifle.

The evening following this gas attack the battalion was relieved by the 25th Battalion of the A.I.F., and proceeded in thirty G.S. wagons and three lorries (as it was not safe to march men so soon after a gas attack) to Bailleul, where guides met the battalion and took them to their billets in Haegedoorne. Only one night was spent in this village before the battalion marched to a camp at Locre known as Wakefield Huts. After a day in this ideal camp the battalion moved closer to the line, and occupied a camp in a sandpit at the foot of Kemmel Hill known as Kemmel Shelters. This camp, that was used by the battalion in Brigade support, was vacated on June 27th, when the battalion took over a sector of the line in front of Kemmel Village from the 2nd Leinster Regiment with a reserve company billeted in Kemmel Chateau. This house had so far not been touched by a German shell—

rumour said because it had been owned by a German.

This sector of the line was in many respects worse than that that had been just vacated ; the accommodation for the two front-line companies was very bad, while the left sub-sector was continually being flattened out by heavy trench mortars fired from concrete positions in Petit Bois, against which the British artillery was apparently powerless.

The time was rapidly approaching when the long-expected Allied offensive would begin, and the British front was all along the scene of intense artillery duels (The term "artillery duel" is probably misleading, as it was the infantry rather than the opposing artillery that was the target on either side.)

On June 28th the battalion was subjected to a particularly intense bombardment on its front trenches, during which 2nd-Lieutenant A. F. J. Burnham was killed, in whom the battalion lost an exceedingly lovable officer. Thirty casualties were inflicted in the course of this bombardment, which lasted less than a half-hour, bringing the casualties for the month of June up to 12 killed and 105 wounded, some of whom died in hospital. These casualties are not really heavy when it is considered that both sides were preparing for a great struggle and endeavouring to discover where the blow that was impending was to fall.

The 24th Division did not at once join in the offensive that opened on the Somme on July 1st, but the same day it took over a portion of additional frontage from another division, and the 7th Northhamptons found themselves holding the front line with three companies instead of only two. This additional sector proved to be less desirable than that already held, being constantly shelled with heavy trench mortars, which necessitated holding the line with as few men as possible, who, however, had to be especially alert.

On July 10th the battalion was called upon to carry

out a raid on the enemy's trenches, and a party of 1 officer and 24 other ranks who had previously rehearsed the operation left the front line at 12.55 a.m. Owing to the artillery on another Brigade front opening with a sudden burst of fire, the enemy took alarm and sent up Véry lights, discovering two of the party who were cutting the wire. As the hoped-for element of surprise had failed, it was deemed unwise to proceed further with the operation, and thus, after Lance-Corporal Rogers, Privates Smith, Gandell, and Brown had discharged their bombs into the German lines, which were by this time heavily manned, the party withdrew to their own lines as soon as the firing slackened, bringing their casualties (three wounded) with them.

The next day the battalion relieved the 8th Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment in their old trenches in front of Wulverghem.

It had been decided that this sector was as favourable for the discharge of gas by the one side as by the other, and thus shortly after the return of the North-amptons to this sector every available man was turned out nightly to carry up the gas cylinders to the front line. This operation was conducted without mishap, and it was arranged that these cylinders should be discharged if the wind remained favourable in conjunction with a minor operation that the 17th Infantry Brigade had prepared. As the wind changed round, it was not possible, however, to discharge the gas.

The time had at last arrived for the 24th Division to move south and take its part in the Battle of the Somme, and on July 20th the battalion was relieved by the 12th King's Liverpool Regiment, and proceeded by G.S. wagons and motor buses to a rest area at Godewaersvelde.

The Battle of Loos in 1915 had proved the futility of carrying about more stores and kit than was absolutely necessary, and thus the two days' respite in this



locality were spent in reducing kits and stores to a minimum before the battalion entrained for the new battlefield.

Considerable reinforcements of officers and men had been received, and during the trench warfare of the past six months the battalion had grown tired of that form of warfare, and anxious to try its hand once more at an attack on a large scale.

On July 24th the battalion entrained for Saleux, and from there marched to Molliens-Vidame, where a week was spent in training and preparing for the battle. At this village the battalion concert party ("The Cobblers"), arranged by Captain H. Grierson, gave two Pierrot concerts from a stage erected in a field. These concerts were attended by the Brigade Headquarters staff as well as the majority of the civilian inhabitants, who thoroughly appreciated seeing two officers take the part of females, though the part taken by Lieutenant Durrant-Swann was rather a burlesque than an impersonation.

The energy thrown into the training and recreation at Molliens-Vidame was indeed a good augury for the success the battalion was to achieve in the greatest battle of the year.

Once again, as at Loos in 1915, and as it was to be at Vimy, Messines, and Ypres in 1917, the battalion was encouraged to believe that the impending battle was to be decisive, and nerved itself for a final titanic effort to end the war.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SOMME, 1916

AFTER spending a week training at Molliens-Vidame, on July 31st the battalion proceeded by motor-buses to Hangest, where they entrained for Vecquemont. On arrival at Vecquemont the battalion marched through Corbie to billets in Sailly-le-Sec. One day was spent in that place before the battalion proceeded to a bivouac camp in Happy Valley, near Bray. This camp was eventually vacated for one nearer the line, known as The Citadel, and on August 14th the battalion moved to positions near the old British front line in the neighbourhood of Montauban. While in that neighbourhood the battalion was employed in working-parties in and round Trones Wood. These working-parties were engaged in constructing a communication trench up to the front line, but their progress was greatly hindered by the heavy shelling and the fact that the whole area was littered with the unburied dead of the recent fighting.

These working-parties in Trones Wood were fortunately attended with very few casualties, but it was with a certain amount of relief that the battalion, on August 17th, received orders to relieve the 8th Royal West Kent Regiment (72nd Infantry Brigade) in the line. This relief was accomplished without incident, and the battalion prepared for the attack on Guillemont it had been ordered to make the next day. This attack was to be part of an assault on a wide front, and the objective assigned to the 7th Northamp-tons was a stone quarry on the western edge of the village of Guillemont. The 3rd Rifle Brigade, attacking on the left, were to take the station and the

13th Middlesex Regiment to attack on the south side of the village. It had been decided that this attack, unlike the majority of previous battles, should take place in the afternoon, and it was hoped thereby to surprise the enemy with a daylight assault.

Shortly before midday on August 18th the zero hour was changed and various other alterations made in the operation orders, and the Commanding Officer (Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs) decided to meet all O.C. companies in the support line. A deep T-trench was selected for this interview, and the Commanding Officer had barely outlined the new orders when a shell, striking the top of the trench, partially buried the occupants. On extricating themselves it was found that the Commanding Officer had been wounded in the shoulder-blade, and that his back was already stiffening, and it was feared that his spine had been affected. Captain H. Grierson ("A" Company) had been wounded and badly shaken; the other officers, Captain R. Gurney and Captain H. B. King, had escaped without injury.

Captain Grierson had to be evacuated, and Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs, much against his will, had to be sent down the line, leaving Captain H. B. King to take command. Shortly before zero, however, Major Murphy (2nd Leinster Regiment) was sent to take command of the assault, arriving half an hour before zero.

At 2.45 p.m. the barrage lifted and the battalion left their trenches. Until right up to the German front line very few casualties were suffered. It was then discovered that a trench, invisible from the British line, was held in strength. "A" and "C" Companies suffered heavily from this trench; "B" Company in support formed the second wave of the attack, and with the assistance of the reserve company ("D") succeeded in capturing the greater part of the objective.

The attack on the flanks meanwhile had proceeded

with varying success. That on the left, made by the 3rd Rifle Brigade, had taken its objective, and was in touch with the left of the battalion not far from two goods wagons that represented all that the bombardment had left of Guillemont Station. On the right, however, the 13th Middlesex Regiment, after reaching their first objective, had been cut down almost to a man by machine-gun fire from a strong point on their right that had so far resisted all assaults, and had been obliged to fall back almost to their original line, after leaving all four company commanders dead in the German line.

The situation was now serious for the 7th Northamp-ton; their right flank was in touch with no one. It was, however, essential to hold on to this position, and Major Murphy, after visiting the position, sent back for a section of machine gunners to be sent up. These machine gunners lost heavily on the way up, and it was not found possible to equip even one complete team from the survivors that arrived, and thus the night of August 18th-19th was an exceedingly anxious one. Small parties of the enemy were seen throughout the night creeping towards the new line, but the battalion Lewis gunners were able to deal with them, and no counter-attack developed. At dusk next day the battalion was relieved by the 8th Royal West Kent Regiment, and returned to the old trenches near Montauban. Major Murphy rejoined his battalion as Commanding Officer, and Captain H. B. King resumed command. It was found that the casualties amounted to—

Officers : Killed, 5 ; wounded, 15 ; missing, 1.

Other ranks : Killed, 45 ; wounded, 258 ; missing, 49.

It transpired afterwards that nearly all those at first reported missing had really been killed or wounded.

The battalion had suffered severely in its first share in the Somme Battle, but it was realized that the

battalion must expect more fighting before it left that area.

Drafts of reinforcements were received nearly at once—some from the Hertford Cyclists, some from the Norfolk Yeomanry, and some from the reserve battalion of the Regiment.

On August 22nd the battalion marched to a camp known as the Sand Pits, about two miles from Albert. While there Major E. Lascelles (11th Rifle Brigade) joined to command, but left next day, as he had apparently been sent by mistake.

On August 25th the battalion marched to a camping-ground near Dernancourt, and on arrival there in the pouring rain it was found that very few shelters were available, and thus the battalion was compelled to bivouac. Five days were spent there, and then the battalion received orders to relieve the 2nd Battalion Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in the support line between High Wood and Delville Wood. As this order was received just prior to the time to parade, no reconnaissance was possible, and the battalion set off at once on a ten-mile march. Considerable anxiety was felt as to whether the new drafts, consisting as they did largely of cyclists and yeomanry, would be able to manage the march, which lay mostly over rough tracks and old trenches.

The march was, however, accomplished without one man falling out, and the battalion took up its new position in Savoy Trench.

On September 2nd the battalion relieved the 9th Royal Sussex and the 2nd Leinster Regiments in the front line in Tea Trench and Tea Lane, and the battalion set about reclaiming these trenches, and establishing communication with the battalions on the flanks.

The same evening Major T. H. S. Swanton arrived from the 1st East Surrey Regiment and took command. As the trenches were so bad, it had been decided that

the tour in the line should be limited to twenty-four hours ; but when the Northamptons were due for relief, the 1st Royal Fusiliers were so heavily gassed on their way up through Catapillar Valley that the Northamptons were compelled to remain in the line till the evening of September 4th, when they were relieved by the 7th King's Regiment (55th Division). On relief the battalion returned to a camp near Fri-court, and next day marched to Dernancourt.

The 24th Division, except for the divisional artillery, had now completed their participation in the Somme Battle. All units had suffered heavily, but it was not entirely the casualties that had made the month and half so trying. During the whole period orders had been postponed till the last minute and then often cancelled. This uncertainty was well illustrated on August 27th, when the battalion had no sooner moved its camp 500 yards to the other side of a valley in a violent thunderstorm than an order was received to move up to the line at once and take over some trenches.

Since Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs had been wounded no less than four officers had commanded the battalion, and the battalion had had to take over a difficult part of the battlefield with young boys just out from England and officers who had for the most part seen little if any active service.

The conditions during the second tour in the line on the Somme were thus exceedingly difficult, and though the casualties did not amount to more than 80, all ranks, this number is in no way a criterion for estimating the exhaustion from which the battalion suffered during the Somme Battle.

In such a sketchy account of the Somme Battle it would be invidious to attempt to mention all those who specially distinguished themselves, but the conduct of Lieutenant B. Wright on August 18th, for which he was awarded the Military Cross, and the behaviour of the battalion stretcher-bearers and runners on the

same day, should never be forgotten ; while all ranks were delighted when Lieutenant-Colonel E. R. Mobbs was awarded the D.S.O. for his share in the success of August 18th.

In addition to those mentioned, the following immediate awards of Military Medals were made :-

14903	Corporal	E. E. Bunyan.
20023	Private	J. Blake.
12956	„	S. Childs.
17263	„	K. E. Barby.
18780	„	F. Warley.
15731	„	E. Carr.
14737	„	W. West.

The battalion had now taken its part in its second great battle, and had received high praise from the Higher Command for its conduct. This praise had, however, been won at a heavy cost, and the whole of the 24th Division required a few days' rest before it could again take the line as an effective fighting unit.

## CHAPTER IX

### VIMY AND LOOS, 1916

ON September 19th the battalion left Dernancourt and entrained at Longpre for Foucquerieul, and thence marched to billets in Bruay, a fair-sized mining town six miles south-west of Bethune.

At this town it was learnt that the 73rd Infantry Brigade would relieve the South African Brigade of the 9th Division in the line on the Vimy Ridge in front of Souchez, and after two days the battalion marched into the divisional reserve billets in Estree-Gauchie.

On September 23rd the relief of the 2nd South African Battalion was accomplished, and the battalion was disposed with two companies in Carency Village and the other two companies in the Bajorolle support line. On the same day Captain R. C. Fowler, who since soon after the Battle of Loos had been employed on the 73rd Infantry Brigade staff as Brigade Transport Officer, was wounded by an anti-aircraft shell while standing outside Brigade Headquarters.

After a week in support the battalion moved into the front line and relieved the 2nd Leinster Regiment. This portion of the front was chiefly notable for the unparalleled use of trench mortars on both sides, but it had the advantage of possessing a few mined dug-outs which afforded shell-proof cover, and the battalion, during its stay in this sector, increased this accommodation considerably.

On October 8th the battalion lost two officers, Lieutenant C. L. Clarke being shot dead while out on patrol in the early morning, and 2nd-Lieutenant R. E. Duchesne being killed the same evening while examining the wire in front of the battalion. Two days after



the battalion carried out a raid opposite this front. The raiding party, under Lieutenant Shankster and 2nd-Lieutenant B. Wright, left the front line at 3.55 a.m. in two parties. On approaching the German line, the enemy was discovered to be "standing to" but as an identification was required, and was indeed the chief object of the raid, Lieutenant Shankster decided to enter the German lines. Both parties entered the trench at the same spot with orders to bomb along the trench in opposite directions. A large German dug-out was discovered at the point of entrance. "P" (phosphorous) bombs were thrown into this dug-out, and three Germans, on being smoked out, refusing to surrender, were shot.

Unfortunately, Lieutenant Shankster had been killed, and 2nd-Lieutenant B. Wright brought back the remainder of the party at 4.22 a.m.

Lieutenant Shankster was the only casualty suffered by the party, and three Germans were known to have been killed, while bombs had been thrown at many others, which it is reasonably certain to believe caused further casualties.

On the afternoon of that day the battalion was relieved by the 3rd Rifle Brigade (17th Infantry Brigade), and moved back to Divisional Reserve.

While out in reserve the following awards of the Military Medal were announced in *The Times* some time after the deeds for which they had been awarded had taken place :—

15216	Lance-Sergeant	W. Redley.
12788	Corporal	C. H. Filkins.
18335	„	C. V. Blythe.
15720	Lance-Corporal	W. A. Cotton.
17109	„	W. L. Drage.
15285	„	C. Jinks.

October 25th was a day of great rejoicing for the battalion, for on that day Lieutenant-Colonel E. R.

Mobbs, D.S.O., rejoined the battalion, although he had not yet completely recovered from the wound he received on August 18th on the Somme. The same day Lieutenant-Colonel Swanton rejoined the 1st East Surreys after commanding the Northhamptons for six weeks.

Soon after the return of Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs the battalion was relieved by the 14th Canadian Battalion, and proceeded to take over a sector of the front known as the Double Crassiers to the south of the village of Loos.

The chief characteristic of this sector was the feature from which it took its name. The Double Crassier was composed of two high mounds of slag that had been discarded from the neighbouring Fosses, which, while converging on the German side of the line at ground level, separated as they approached the British line, and ran to a height of about 50 feet. Owing to the observation over the British lines, it was essential that the western ends should not be held by the enemy, and thus the battalion took over posts on each of these crassiers and held them by night and day. The position of these posts was rather precarious, as it was impossible to conceal their position, and they were subjected to a considerable amount of trench-mortar and rifle-grenade fire.

North of this feature another characteristic in the German line should be noticed: this was a network of trenches round an old mine crater protruding from the main German defences. This feature, which was known from its shape as the Triangle, was not usually held in great strength, and was the scene of patrols nearly every night.

Lieutenant Berridge, the battalion Intelligence Officer, was out on patrol nearly every night, usually in the German lines, and this front afforded excellent facilities for these adventures.

After each tour of from six to eight days in the front

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line, the battalion returned to cellars in Maroc, or billets in Les Brebis, and spent the night up in the line on working parties, or burying cables in the forward area.

About this time Captain R. Gurney, one of the first New Army officers to join the battalion in 1914, was attached as a Staff Learner to the 72nd Infantry Brigade, and after about a year's probation was appointed to a position on the Staff at Second Army Headquarters.

The tenure of this sector of the front passed without much incident until December 12th, when news was received of a further French success at Verdun, whereupon a large notice was posted up on a board in No Man's Land with the following inscription :—

“ CAPTURED AT VERDUN.  
11,300 Prisoners.  
116 Guns.  
69 Machine Guns.”

This notice received considerable attention from the enemy during the course of the day, and was eventually destroyed.

Towards the middle of December Brigadier-General R. Jelf was evacuated sick, and Brigadier-General W. Dugan took over command of the 73rd Infantry Brigade.

Christmas Day, 1916, was not to be spent out at rest as the last one had been, and yet, in spite of the fact that the battalion was in the line and that the trenches were in a very wet condition and nearly all the dug-outs were dripping with water, an ever-memorable Christmas Day was spent.

Extras in the way of plum pudding, sausages, oranges, cigars, bloaters, and beer, were issued, and for once no working parties were ordered.

The monotony of this form of trench warfare that the battalion had been indulging in since the Somme

Battle was liable to have a serious effect on the moral of the troops, and for this reason Major-General J. Capper, C.B., Commanding the 24th Division, instituted a system of almost weekly raids on the German lines. Even when a battalion was not called on to carry out a raid, patrols were busy exploding Bangalore torpedoes under the German wire, and the enemy was thus kept in a condition of continual expectancy.

This activity was not confined to one side alone, and on January 24th the enemy launched a determined assault on a portion of the battalion front held by "D" Company.

Attacking with about eighty men during the early morning under a heavy bombardment of trench mortars, a party of one officer and twelve men succeeded in reaching one of the forward saps running out from the battalion front. Of this party the officer and five men were killed, and the rest driven off with the assistance of two sentry groups belonging to "B" Company. This attack had thus been a complete failure, as while the enemy had left some of his dead in the British line he had not secured any identification from the battalion.

For their conduct on this occasion "B" and "D" Companies were later personally congratulated by General Anderson, Commanding First Army Corps, as well as by the Brigade and Divisional Commanders.

The 24th Division had by now been in the line without any real rest for a year, and it was essential that all units should have a period of training before the campaigns of 1917 opened. Everyone realized that the year 1917 was likely to see much hard fighting, but hopes were still high that the war might be ended before the next Christmas.

On January 11th the long-expected relief took place, and after handing over to the 8th Battalion East Lancashire Regiment, the battalion proceeded by route march to the reserve training area at Lapugnoy. On the march the Division was inspected by Field-Marshal

Sir Douglas Haig, who expressed his appreciation of the march discipline of the troops to the Divisional Commander.

On arrival in Lapugnoy, the battalion was billeted in the village, and the next few days were spent in clearing up and inoculation. General Nivelles, Commanding the French Armies, inspected the 73rd Infantry Brigade on January 16th, and after this the battalion settled down to a definite programme of training. The afternoons were devoted to recreation, and a Brigade Football Competition was arranged. After defeating in succession the 73rd Brigade Machine Gun Company, the 73rd Light Trench Mortar Battery, the 9th Royal Sussex Regiment, and the 73rd Brigade Headquarters, the 7th Northhamptons won the cup, which was presented to the team on the field by Major-General J. Capper. In the Divisional cross-country race the battalion team finished fourth, with Captain Elliman as fifth man in and Corporal Moore as seventh.

After spending three weeks in this area, the Division moved up to the line once more, having benefited greatly by the training during this period. Lapugnoy was a very prettily situated village, and everyone was very comfortably billeted there, while it had the additional attraction of possessing a first-class football ground that belonged to a Casualty Clearing Station, but which the battalion were permitted to use when they liked.

Altogether the time spent at rest had been thoroughly enjoyed by all ranks, and the battalion was well set up for the hard struggles that were before them before the year was over.

## CHAPTER X

### VIMY, 1917

On leaving the rest billets at Lapugnoy, the battalion marched up to the Souchez area, spending the night of March 3rd-4th at the village of Haillicourt. On the following day the march was continued to the neighbourhood of Ablain St. Nazaire, where the battalion relieved the 2nd Leinster Regiment in the support lines. After six days in support the battalion was relieved by the 73rd Canadian Battalion, and took over the front line in the Souchez area, a section of the trench system on the left of that which the Division had formerly occupied on the Vimy Ridge.

The trenches in this area were in a poor condition, and the battalion was kept busy draining the line and improving the dug-out accommodation, which was far from adequate. Situated in front of the British lines was a shell-beaten tree known as "The Lone Tree," and on the top of this tree Lieutenant Berridge hoisted a red ensign during one night. This action caused considerable annoyance to the enemy, who endeavoured without success to shoot it down; and as the days went on it seemed particularly suitable that the flag of the merchant service should float over the shell-pitted No Man's Land, which was rapidly coming to resemble an ocean of water and mud.

After a tour of six to eight days in the line, the battalion moved back either to billets in Petit Sains and Sains-en-Gohelle as divisional reserve, or else took up a position on and around Lorette Spur in brigade reserve.

Ever since the battalion had arrived in this sector it had been the scene of increasing activity on both

sides. The Canadians on Vimy Ridge had been making repeated raids on the German lines in order to obtain identification of the troops opposite them, while on the front of the 24th Division patrol activity had been very marked. On April 7th the 73rd Infantry Brigade received orders to prepare to carry out an attack on the Bois-en-Hache in front of their lines in conjunction with the Canadian attack on Vimy Ridge. This attack had been planned for the evening of April 9th, but at the last minute, owing to the impassable nature of No Man's Land, it was postponed. On the early morning of April 12th, however, the ground had improved sufficiently to become passable, and the 2nd Leinster Regiment and the 9th Royal Sussex Regiment launched their attack simultaneously with an attack by the Canadians on a strong point known as the "Pimple" on the northern end of the Ridge. Between the two attacking forces lay the River Souchez, and it had been decided that the 7th Northampton, in Brigade support, should attack on a frontage of 200 yards on the north of this river the same evening.

The operations carried out by the Canadians and the 73rd Infantry Brigade, though attended with great difficulties, had been, however, a complete success, and thus it was not necessary for the Northampton to carry out their operation. Reports were, however, received during the night that the enemy was massing in front of Liévin for a counter-attack, and the battalion was held in readiness to meet this attack if it should develop. Early on April 13th it became apparent that the enemy, far from contemplating a counter-attack, was in reality preparing to withdraw farther. From Lorette Spur large numbers of explosions could be seen taking place behind the German lines, and it was obvious that the enemy was destroying his dumps and blowing up roads and bridges preparatory to a withdrawal.

Next day the battalion left its trenches and followed in support of the 12th Royal Fusiliers (17th Infantry Brigade) in the direction of Liévin. Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs appointed an approximate position in Liévin for each company from a map, and ordered each company commander to lead his company to that spot as he thought best.

This liberty of action was certainly wise, as the enemy were shelling their vacated positions fairly heavily ; and yet, in spite of this shelling, the battalion reached its position with hardly a casualty. A halt was made near the Red Mill at Rolencourt, that had been used as the Headquarters of the German heavy gunners, in order to allow the 12th Royal Fusiliers to keep ahead, and, had the enemy been aware, the sunken road leading from there to Liévin would have provided an excellent target for his artillery. The day was, however, a fine one, and the British aeroplanes were busy, and prevented the enemy from observing this concentration.

After about an hour the companies moved forward to their allotted positions in Liévin, and found everywhere signs of a hurried withdrawal on the part of the enemy. The battalion had been warned repeatedly to look out for mines and other "booby traps," especially in dug-outs ; but after a careful search, it was found that the excellent dug-outs in Liévin had not been mined, and the battalion settled down in unwonted comfort.

On April 16th the battalion moved out of Liévin, and relieved the 13th Middlesex Regiment in the front line on the eastern edge of the Bois de Riaumont, with the 17th Infantry Brigade on its left and the 5th Division holding a line on its right. The Bois de Riaumont was heavily shelled by the enemy, as the undergrowth was still thick, and it would have been possible to concentrate a large number of troops there if required. The approach from Liévin was, however,



under direct observation, and even small parties visible on the road were at once shelled.

It was neither possible nor desirable to hold a continuous front line, and thus the frontage was held by means of a few isolated posts of a section or two dotted along the edge of the wood, while the majority of the troops were kept farther back in support inside the wood. It was thus conceivable that an enterprising patrol of the enemy might evade these outposts and lie hidden in the wood, and a certain number of snipers did, in fact, adopt this course, and were exceedingly difficult to locate.

During the afternoon of April 17th General Capper, General Dugan, his Brigade Major (Major R. Howlett), and the Commandant, R.E., visited the front line without first obtaining from the Commanding Officer the exact position of his sentry groups. While wandering in the wood these officers were suddenly fired on at point-blank range by three Germans. As the officers were either unarmed or their revolvers were underneath their mackintoshes, there was no other course open to them but to take to their heels. Luckily, the Germans were apparently equally surprised, and did not pursue them, but themselves retreated. Meanwhile the four officers, stumbling over the thick undergrowth, continued their headlong flight and reached a company headquarters. General Capper had just sufficient breath left to gasp out, "Counter-attack! counter-attack!" The company commander, who was peacefully sleeping, required considerable rousing before he could collect his thoughts sufficient to organize a counter-attack on the wood, now believed to be veritably full of Germans. Two platoons, under Lieutenant Warton, were, however, sent out to act as an advance guard for a larger force, which had by now been summoned from the support battalion in Liévin. Before these troops could arrive, however, Lieutenant Warton had reported that the wood was clear of the

enemy, and everyone settled down again. It was discovered, however, that a sentry group of "A" Company had all been either killed or captured, and in this manner a party of the enemy had doubtless effected an entry into the wood. This post was replaced, and thenceforth no more Germans were seen within the British lines.

Posts had been established in houses on the outskirts of Lens, but the same evening, under Brigade orders, these posts were withdrawn. For the following morning an operation had been planned by which "B" Company were to capture a row of houses east of the wood on either side of the Liévin—Lens road. As it was believed that the cellars of these houses were linked up and would afford some difficulty, it had been decided that the signal for the attack should be a sudden outburst of artillery fire on a cross-roads outside Lens. At 5 a.m., the approximate hour settled for the attack, the leading platoon, under Lieutenant Underwood, was in position on the edge of the wood. The artillery, however, did not open, and after waiting till it was getting too light, the platoon was withdrawn and the attack abandoned. It transpired later that the artillery had not been warned or had mistaken the target, and as the machine gunners were also awaiting the artillery, the abandonment of the operation was considered fully justified.

The same evening "C" Company reoccupied the houses they had been ordered to abandon; and 2nd-Lieutenant Morris and 2nd-Lieutenant Berridge occupied a further eight rows of houses on the outskirts of Lens before the battalion was relieved by two battalions of the 46th Division, the 6th and 8th Sherwood Foresters.

After a tour in trenches amounting to twenty-eight days, the battalion marched back to billets in Petit Sains. During the tour in the line the battalion had suffered 61 casualties, of which 17 had been killed,

including those that took place during the relief. Throughout this period hardly anyone had been able to take off his boots or have a proper wash, and thus it was with great relief that all learnt that they were to enjoy a few days' respite before again taking over a portion of the front.

After spending a day in Petit Sains, the battalion marched via Auchel to Febvin-Palfart, where it was billeted. While here the Brigadier-General Commanding addressed the battalion, and congratulated them on their recent march, and also presented medals to the football team given by himself and the Commanding Officer, for the competition that had been held when the Brigade was at Lapugnoy. After remaining at this village from April 22nd to April 26th, orders were received for the battalion to march to the Noeux-les-Mines area. After spending a night in billets at Camblain-Chatelain, the battalion moved into a hutment camp in Noeux-les-Mines. The next few days were spent in almost continued marching.

On leaving Noeux-les-Mines the battalion marched to Lapugnoy, where three days were spent, and then marched on to the village of L'Ecleme, where it was billeted for the night. The next day a march of nine miles brought the battalion to Thiennes (six miles south of Hazebrouck). The battalion remained here two days, during which Major-General J. Capper bade farewell to the battalion on leaving the 24th Division to take over an important administrative position in the newly formed Tank Corps.

Major-General Capper had commanded the 24th Division during all the hard fighting that had taken place since the Battle of Loos, and had earned the admiration and respect of every private soldier in the Division. Major-General Bols was sent from Third Army Headquarters to command the Division, which position he held until General Allenby, his old chief at Third Army Headquarters, sent for him to become his Chief of Staff in Egypt and Palestine.

While at Thiennes the battalion was able to indulge in the luxury of swimming sports in the canal.

On May 12th the battalion marched off in a very hot sun to the neighbourhood of Godewaersvelde via Hazebrouck and Steenvoorde, arriving at its destination after a march of nearly ten hours. After a day in billets, a four-hours' march brought the battalion to Vancouver Camp, between Ouderdom and Reninghelst. Soon afterwards the battalion was moved to another camp (Toronto Camp), and the battalion settled down to working parties once more. The weather was now very different from the wet and snow from which the battalion had suffered during the Vimy fighting, and the arrival of hot, sunny days made it probable that the British offensive that had opened at Vimy would soon be continued on other portions of the front.

The end of May found the battalion once more preparing for a battle and working feverishly on burying cables and other preliminaries necessary before the regular routine of trench warfare could give place to more active operations.

One incident should not, however, pass unrecorded, and that was the death of Major H. Millard. This officer had joined the battalion as a Captain, and was killed by a shell near Battalion Headquarters shortly before the Vimy offensive. Though new to warfare on the Western Front (he had previously served in Gallipoli), this officer had made great efforts to adapt himself to the altered conditions, and at the time of his death was rendering Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs valuable assistance as Second-in-Command.

By the end of May, 1917, the 24th Division had thus already taken its share in one great offensive, and was already preparing for a further struggle, a month earlier than active operation had been possible the year before, and an unprecedented mass of artillery was already opening up the way for the infantry along a wide sector of the Flanders front.

## CHAPTER XI

### MESSINES, 1917

ON May 29th the battalion moved from Toronto Camp to one at Heksen, in order to be nearer the scene of its chief working parties at Swann Château. For the next week the battalion worked hard on a large mined dug-out in the grounds of this château, which was to form the concentration area for the battalion prior to the attack on the Messines Ridge.

The details for this attack had been worked out most carefully, down to the smallest detail, and the officers and N.C.Os. of the battalion had become thoroughly acquainted with the features of the country behind the German lines by means of a clay model of the country that had been prepared in the grounds of a Divisional Headquarters in Reninghelst. This model had been most skilfully constructed so as to demonstrate the chief characteristics of the country, and proved to be of great value to the assaulting troops.

On the evening of June 6th the battalion marched up to Swann Château, and arrived there about 2 a.m. next morning. During the march the battalion was shelled pretty heavily, but on approaching the château grounds it was found that gas shells were being fired in large numbers, and it was found necessary to wear the box helmets. The night was a very dark one, and as the track to be followed lay across a network of old trenches and among several felled trees, the platoon guides that had previously reconnoitred the route to the grounds found great difficulty in recognizing their way. One or two were themselves already suffering slightly from the effects of gas, and thus those platoon commanders who had not previously been able

to reconnoitre the ground were forced to trust to their instinct to find the entrances to the dug-out.

This dug-out was, when once entered, of sufficient size to accommodate the whole battalion, but the entrances had not been completed, and it was only after considerable difficulty that the battalion was able to gain an entrance at all. Soon after the last company was safely under cover the shelling in the neighbourhood cleared, and shortly before the zero hour for the attack, at 3.10 a.m., an almost supernatural stillness prevailed, to be broken by the simultaneous firing of hundreds of batteries at zero.

It was common knowledge that the mines to be fired under the German lines in front of St. Eloi and near Petit Bois had been in process of construction since 1915, and high hopes were affixed to the moral and destructive effect the explosion would cause, and in this hopes were well-founded.

One gigantic flash lit up the sky as these mines were exploded, and the earth could be felt to quake for miles round.

The 24th Division had not been called on to undertake the initial assault, but had been held in support to carry further objectives when the 41st Division had secured their objectives, and thus it was not till 2 p.m. that the battalion left Swann Château and moved forward on the south side of the Ypres Canal, and occupied some trenches north of St. Eloi.

About 2.30 a.m. next morning the battalion left these trenches and advanced across a sunken carriage drive, known as the Dammstrasse, that had been strongly fortified with concrete pill-boxes, and captured its allotted objective in Dennis and Ravine Woods with hardly a casualty. The line of trenches that had been taken proved to have been completely destroyed by shellfire, and the battalion was dependent on a few untouched concrete pill-boxes and what cover they could dig for themselves.

At 10 p.m. the Germans launched a counter-attack which was not pressed home with any determination, and was easily disposed of by the artillery. Except for occasional bursts of firing occasioned by the firing of S.O.S. rockets on the flanks, the battalion had a comparatively quiet time in the line the next few days; and on relief by the 32nd Battalion Royal Fusiliers (41st Division) on June 11th, it was found that the casualties suffered by the battalion amounted only to 7 killed and 44 wounded for the whole operation, and several of these were only slight wounds.

The attack on the Messines Ridge had, indeed, planned out like clockwork, and not a single hitch was experienced during the whole operation. The effect of the explosion of the mines had been so demoralizing for the enemy that there can be little doubt that, had the strategic situation demanded it, the 24th Division could have greatly increased the captured area, and have advanced almost unopposed in the direction of Warneton.

Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs had been twice struck by pieces of shell during the battle, but had luckily escaped injury, though it was deemed wiser for him to proceed on leave to England, as he had been badly bruised. Major T. Foster was accordingly sent to take command from the 9th Royal Sussex, and joined the battalion in Micmac Camp, two miles east of Reninghelst.

A few days were spent in reconnoitring the new area, and then, on June 15th, the battalion moved up and took over a sector of the line in front of Hill 60 between the railway line and Klein Zillebeke.

The route up to this sector lay past Bedford House on the St. Eloi—Ypres road, Jackson's Dump on the Verbrandokmolen road, and through the sunken railway cutting near Hill 60. Each of these places deserves a chapter to itself, and the mere mention will be full of recollections for those who ever visited these spots;

but suffice it to say here that at none of these places would even the would-be suicide linger longer than was absolutely necessary.

The front was held by the battalion with only six strong points, but this did not greatly reduce the risk of casualties, as the rear lines were heavily shelled and offered little cover, and "B" Company in support suffered heavily, losing from shell fire one night 35 all ranks killed and wounded, including 2nd-Lieutenant Adderley among those killed.

The actual frontage was still in a condition of flux, and German patrols and stragglers were being constantly apprehended in the battalion's lines. On one occasion the Brigadier-General Commanding and Captain Marshall ("A" Company) captured a German artillery observation officer and his batman who had entered the lines by mistake. At midnight June 23rd-24th the 1st North Staffords began to relieve the battalion, but, owing to heavy shelling, it was not till 4 a.m. that the last company had been relieved in the front line. During the march back to Micmac Camp the companies were shelled nearly the whole way, and three officers were wounded on the way back to camp.

The total casualties for the tour in the Hill 60 sector had amounted to 7 officers and 115 other ranks, which justified these eight days being ranked among the most difficult the battalion ever experienced, and proved that a successful offensive is infinitely cheaper in lives than is the period of consolidation following that offensive.

On this occasion in the Hill 60 sector the battalion had not the consolation and excitement of an advance, but was forced to remain in shell-holes exposed to systematic artillery bombardments.

On June 26th Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs rejoined, and next day entrained the battalion for Lumbres, whence they marched into billets in Bayenham, nine miles west of St. Orme. A heavy thunderstorm caught



the battalion as it was approaching this village, and it was a very bedraggled column that made its way into its billets about 8 p.m.

Two regular officers of the regiment joined the 7th Battalion at this place. Major D. W. Powell (who commanded after the death of Lieutenant-Colonel E. R. Mobbs) joined as Second-in-Command, and Captain H. W. Jackson joined for a month's probation before being given a Staff appointment.

On July 6th the regimental doctor, Captain A. J. W. Cunningham, R.A.M.C., left the battalion to join the 73rd Field Ambulance, from which he was soon posted to No. 2 Casualty Clearing Station at Bailleul.

Captain Cunningham had served with the battalion for over two years, and was loved by all save the "would-be shirker," who could not but admire his intimate knowledge of human nature.

Situated in the grounds of the château occupied by Battalion Headquarters was a good-sized lake, and the battalion, under the supervision of Major D. W. Powell, set about clearing this of mud and weeds, and turned it into a first-class bathing pool. Aquatic sports were held here one afternoon, and afforded much amusement. Brigade sports were organized, and company football matches with companies of other battalions were arranged in order that all ranks might come to know the men they would be fighting alongside in the next battle.

It was well known that the capture of the Messines Ridge had been but a preliminary to a larger offensive to secure the high ground commanding the plain of Flanders, and the battalion learnt without surprise that the next battle would start for them not far from the trenches they had just vacated.

Another model was prepared to show the country behind the German lines, and this time all ranks spent a considerable time studying the feature of the ground. Having obtained a good idea of the characteristics to

be expected, the battalion commenced rehearsing the tactical method to be employed.

A large open piece of ground was secured, and the outline of the various objectives was demonstrated by coloured flags, and the 7th Northhamptons and the 2nd Leinsters, who were to be the attacking troops from the 73rd Infantry Brigade, carried out combined assaults on their objectives. During one of these rehearsals Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig arrived on the field and witnessed the attack, and had a few words with members of the battalion.

Nearly three weeks were spent at Bayenham, and with the aid of the ground model, practice trenches, and operations with contact aeroplanes, the coming offensive was rehearsed as far as was possible, and yet at the same time plenty of opportunity was found for recreation and sports.

The thoroughness with which the preparations were rehearsed, and the knowledge of the locality in which the attack was to take place, convinced everyone that the coming battle was to be of a very different nature from that the battalion had taken part in at Messines. The capture of the Messines—Wytshaete Ridge was but the preliminary to an attack on the heights overlooking Pilkem and Gheluvelt, and of that the enemy could not fail to be aware, and thus the moment and method for the attack could alone be a secret.

## CHAPTER XII

YPRES, 1917

ON July 18th the battalion left Bayenham and marched to Renescure, a distance of fifteen miles, where they were billeted for the night. The weather was very hot, and it was arranged that the men's packs should be conveyed in motor lorries to their new billets. No man fell out on the march, which was completed in very good time. The next day the march was continued to a camp near La Kreule, a distance of nine miles, and there all ranks were accommodated in tents. A short march of five miles in a very hot sun brought the battalion next day to Eecke. This march was undertaken in full kit, and the men wore their steel helmets. On arrival at Eecke the Brigadier-General Commanding (General Dugan) complimented the Commanding Officer on the excellent march discipline the battalion had displayed during the journey from its rest area.

On July 21st the battalion left its billets in Eecke and marched nine miles to a staging area a mile outside Reninghelst, where all ranks bivouacked in an open field. The country all round Reninghelst was a mass of camp and transport lines; nearly every field was occupied by troops of some sort, and it was not long before the battalion discovered that a sister battalion (the 6th Northhamptons) was in camp not far off.

The battalion cricket team played a match against the 6th Battalion, and a football match was also arranged; but shortly after this match was played the 7th Battalion moved closer up to the line to the neighbourhood of Micmac Camp, and further liaison became impossible.

The Brigade Operation Orders for the coming battle were received on July 28th, and the next evening the battalion, less "A" Company, moved up into the front line in front of Hill 60.

On July 29th the final arrangements for the attack were made, and next day "A" Company were moved up from camp to take up their battle position. It had not been possible to move up this company before, as the trenches from which they were to attack had become water-logged, and it was impossible for troops to occupy them. The spell of fine weather the battalion had experienced on its march from Bayenham had broken, and rain had been falling nearly continuously for the last few days; and the line, already hammered out of recognition by shell fire, resembled a bog rather than a trench system.

The attack was to take place in Shewesbury Forest, and the 7th Northhamptons were to attack with the 2nd Leinsters on their left and the 1st North Staffords (72nd Infantry Brigade) on their right. The final objective allotted to the 24th Division was a line of hills known as Tower Hamlets Ridge, but the intervening country was singularly featureless, and it was realized that it would be extremely difficult for troops to keep their direction and recognize their position.

As the enemy was undoubtedly expecting an attack in this area, and would be especially prepared for an assault at dawn, it had been decided that the best hope of effecting a surprise lay in attacking during the very early morning, and thus zero hour was fixed for 3.50 a.m. on July 31st.

This hour, at which it was still quite dark, had its disadvantages, chief of which was the danger of the attacking troops losing their direction, and efforts were made to minimize this danger as far as could be.

The rough line the battalion was holding on July 30th represented the position former attacks in that area had reached, and was far from parallel to the objectives

assigned to this attack. In order that the troops might start parallel to their first objective, it had been decided that the first waves should be formed up at zero in front of the existing line.

The 9th Royal Sussex Regiment, from whom the battalion had taken over these trenches, had been asked to put out a row of wooden stakes to mark the outer flanks for the assaulting companies in their assembly positions, and 2nd-Lieutenant Berridge (now Brigade Intelligence Officer) undertook to join up those posts with white tape to facilitate the lining up of the troops at the last minute.

Owing to the darkness of the night, the companies had to begin to take up their position soon after midnight July 30th—31st. "A" and "C" Companies were told off to form the first wave, with "D" Company in support and "B" Company in reserve. "D" Company were at present in a large dug-out known as Canada Street Tunnels, the entrances of which were continually being shelled, and they experienced considerable difficulty in extricating themselves and taking up their position. "B" Company were in reserve farther back in some old mining galleries near Hill 60, known as Larch Wood Tunnels, and had even greater difficulty in reaching their new position. Only one exit could be used, and each member of the company had to be pulled out individually by Lieutenant E. C. Passmore (acting O.C.) and the acting company sergeant-major. While approaching their assembly position this company discovered three Germans lying in a shell-hole some distance behind the battalion front, though how these men had come there was never discovered.

Owing to the darkness and the shelling of No Man's Land, the assaulting companies had hardly taken up their position before the artillery barrage opened and the attack began. The German barrage came down in less than three minutes after zero from fifty

to a hundred yards in front of the forming-up line. This barrage was very heavy, and caused a number of casualties, including two or three platoon commanders, and before long direction had already been lost.

The chief feature in the German line on the 73rd Infantry Brigade front was a strong point in the forest, known as Lower Star Post, and this strong point lay on the left of the battalion's first objective, and was allotted to the 2nd Leinster Regiment. The importance of this position had undoubtedly been underestimated, or it would not have been chosen as the junction of two battalions, for the almost inevitable happened : both battalions unconsciously edged away from this centre of resistance, and the result was that the first objective was reported as captured when in reality the key of the position was still strongly held by the enemy.

The artillery barrage, working as per pre-arranged programme, was now far ahead of the attacking troops, who had been held up by the darkness and the difficulty of the ground ; and thus the battalion, out of touch with the troops on its left flank, was left to its own resources.

At this junction Lieutenant-Colonel E. R. Mobbs, hearing from walking wounded that most of the officers had become casualties and that the second objective had been taken, left his headquarters in Canada Street Tunnels with 2nd-Lieutenant Berridge and moved up to the front line. He soon discovered that the position was not such as had been reported by the wounded, but that the battalion was being held up by a German machine gun. He decided at once to make an attack on this gun, and, leaving 2nd-Lieutenant Berridge with a few men to work round one flank, he himself with a runner worked round the other. It was not long before Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs was shot through the neck with a bullet, and fell into a shell-hole. He had, however, already located the exact position of the



machine gun, and hastily wrote out a note to his Battalion Headquarters. This note was taken by his runner, who, however, never reached Battalion Headquarters, though it was seen by one of the company commanders. When 2nd-Lieutenant Berridge arrived on the spot the Colonel was already dead. Finding that all the officers of the assaulting companies had become casualties, 2nd-Lieutenant Berridge, with Company Sergeant-Major Afford and Sergeant Twentyman, proceeded to organize the line, and sent back word to Captain H. W. Jackson at Battalion Headquarters. The reserve and support companies had already been sent up by Lieutenant-Colonel Mobbs earlier in the action, and "D" Company, 13th Middlesex Regiment, was now sent up in support. This company suffered very heavy losses on the way up, and eventually dug in on a line behind that held by the 7th Northhamptons under the belief that they were the foremost troops.

As Lower Star Post was still in the enemy's hands, and the remains of the 7th Northhamptons were being heavily enfiladed by machine-gun fire from that redoubt, it was decided to withdraw the advanced posts, and 2nd-Lieutenant Berridge again went forward to effect this withdrawal and consolidate a strong line of posts about a trench known as Illusive Avenue. The work done by this officer almost single-handed cannot be overestimated. Captain H. W. Jackson had been ordered by Brigade Headquarters not to leave his headquarters, and thus 2nd-Lieutenant Berridge and Lieutenant E. G. Passmore took command of the troops on the field, which included representatives of the 2nd Leinster Regiment, 13th Middlesex Regiment, and 1st North Staffords.

A carrying party was organized, and wire, sandbags, water and rations, were sent up to this line, which was rapidly consolidated as far as was possible.

A party of reserve stretcher-bearers was sent up

from the transport lines, and the greater part of the battlefield was cleared by nightfall. The regular battalion stretcher-bearers had suffered very heavily, but had done excellent work, and the training of a good number of reserve bearers had been fully justified.

According to the Brigade Operation Orders, the attacking troops were to have been relieved directly after dark on August 1st, but it was not till 4 a.m. next morning that the new front was taken over by portions of the 13th Middlesex and 1st North Staffordshire Regiments. During the night 2nd-Lieutenants Gorrington, Williams, and Wild, and the N.C.Os. and men with them, held on to the new posts, expecting every minute to be relieved.

It was not till midday on August 1st that the last remains of the 7th Northhamptons arrived back in a camp near Dickebusch, and an accurate casualty list could be prepared. It was then found that four officers had been killed or unaccounted for—

Lieutenant-Colonel E. R. Mobbs, D.S.O.

2nd-Lieutenant T. P. Litchfield

„ L. H. Halliday

„ T. Ward

while eight officers had been evacuated wounded. The casualties among other ranks were reported as killed, 37 ; wounded, 162 ; missing, 47 ; and it was discovered later that the majority of the missing had in reality probably been killed.

The casualties had been heavier than had been anticipated, as even the hour of the attack had not, apparently been a surprise to the enemy ; and, indeed, it was discovered later from a captured German Intelligence Summary that even the smallest detail of the July 31st attack was known to the enemy before even the troops themselves were aware of them.

Major D. W. Powell, who as Second-in-Command, had been left behind in the battalion transport lines,



assumed command, and received from the Brigadier-General Commanding 73rd Infantry Brigade the following Special Order of the Day to distribute among the battalion :—

### SPECIAL ORDER.

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I would like to place on record my very high appreciation of the splendid fighting qualities and gallantry of the officers, N.C.Os., and men who took part in the action on July 31st, 1917.

The enemy did his best to break up our attack and prevent us from gaining our objective. He employed his best troops for this purpose. His artillery and machine-gun fire was heavy and intense during the advance ; the ground was boggy and ploughed up with shells. In spite of all these difficulties, the 7th Northamptonshire Regiment and the 2nd Leinster Regiment drove the enemy from his position on the high ground which the Brigade had been ordered to seize. Many officers were either killed or wounded, and the fight resolved itself into a soldiers' battle, which was won by extraordinary pluck and determination.

This is a performance of which the troops may very well feel more than proud.

(Signed) W. DUGAN,

*Brigadier-General.*

*Commanding 73rd Infantry Brigade.*

HEADQUARTERS, 73RD INFANTRY BRIGADE,

*August 6th, 1917.*

The loss of Lieutenant-Colonel E. R. Mobbs, D.S.O., was an irreparable blow for the battalion. He had hitherto seemed to bear such a charmed life that the battalion had never really considered such a possibility. Since the first days of the battalion in Sep-

tember, 1914, he had been its life and soul, and since he had taken command early in 1916 he had done more to increase the efficiency and promote the confidence of the troops than any other man could have done. The fact that his body could not be recovered and buried, as all ranks would have wished, was, perhaps, in one way a good thing, as it helped to keep alive in the battalion his memory, and inspired in everyone the resolve to avenge his death and to end the war that had already caused so much misery and suffering.

The battalion was organized almost at once into two companies under Captain Twigg and Lieutenant Passmore, and Captain H. B. King took over the position of Adjutant, as Captain A. W. Heaton had been evacuated sick.

On August 11th the battalion, thus organized, relieved the 3rd Battalion Rifle Brigade (17th Infantry Brigade) in the line, and were fortunate in having no casualties during the relief. The front was shelled a good deal during this tour, but some captured German dug-outs reduced the casualties considerably, and when on the night of August 15th the battalion was relieved by the 8th Royal West Kents (72nd Infantry Brigade) only 15 casualties had been reported.

"J" camp, near Dickebusch Brewery, was occupied by the battalion on relief, and while the troops were sleeping in their tents the enemy shelled this field and wounded three men and killed an officer's charger.

After two more spells in the line, the latter of which was spent in a sector near the Ypres—Menin road, the battalion was relieved along with the rest of the 24th Division, and moved back to the neighbourhood of Reninghelst prior to entraining for the recently devastated area on the Somme.

Shortly before this move Major S. S. Hayne (Northamptonshire Regiment) joined the battalion as Second-in-Command, and Captain H. W. Jackson left to be attached to the Divisional Staff.

As far as the 24th Division was concerned, active operations for that year were at an end. The Division had had a hard year's fighting, but the area to which it was now to move was to necessitate much hard work before communications could be established and a line of any strength consolidated.

## CHAPTER XIII

### WINTER, 1917-1918

ON September 14th the battalion moved into huts near Westoutre, and next day proceeded in motor buses to billets near Steenwerck, where it remained till September 20th. On that day the battalion entrained at Bailleul, and arrived at Bapaume Station in the early hours of the 21st, and from there marched to a camp near Barastre. One day was spent in this camp, and then the battalion marched on to Haut Allaines, and after a night there proceeded by motor buses to Bernes, which village was later to become one of the reserve camps for the 24th Division.

On September 26th the battalion relieved the 21st Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers in the line in front of Hargicourt, and settled down to adapt itself to the new area.

Not even on the Somme battlefields of 1916 had the battalion witnessed such a scene of destruction as this area presented.

Not a single house had been left standing for miles round, and hardly even a tree; the roads had been blown up at junctions, and all railway lines systematically destroyed by the enemy before he had withdrawn to the Cambrai—St. Quentin line a few months before; and thus, when the 24th Division took over the area, except for a few huts, there was cover for neither man nor animal. The previous division had found plenty to do in rebuilding roads and laying out tracks, and thus the 24th Division was dependent for camps on what it could construct for itself.

The front line also was in a very poor condition, and though there was not much shelling the trenches



## CHAPTER XIV

### MARCH, 1918

AT about 4.30 a.m. on March 21st the noise of a heavy bombardment could be heard at Hancourt, and it was evident that the offensive had opened. At 5.40 a.m. the battalion received orders to "stand to," and move up to their battle stations. Well within the half-hour allotted the last company had moved off, and was soon in position, with Battalion Headquarters in a dug-out in Jeancourt.

The battalion, disposed in the four redoubts, was in support of the 17th Infantry Brigade, who were holding the front near Le Verguier, and also of the right of the 66th Division on their left. A thick fog made observation impossible, and it was exceedingly difficult to obtain accurate information of the progress of the battle.

Before long the right flank of the 66th Division was driven back to the line held by "B" Company, 7th Northhamptons, and the 17th Infantry Brigade were forced back a short way, but held on to the village of Le Verguier, the key of their front (where the 8th Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment) were offering an exceedingly gallant resistance).

The night March 21st-22nd was spent in these redoubts, but as the enemy renewed his attacks next morning, again assisted by a thick mist, the 17th Infantry Brigade, about 8 a.m., were forced back, owing to their right flank being turned, and the battalion found themselves heavily engaged with the enemy at about midday.

By 1 p.m. it was obvious that the battalion, with both its flanks in the air, was in an exceedingly critical



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*To face page 84*

were in bad repair and full of water. Hand-pumps were useless to remove the sticky mud, and until a good supply of mud-scoops were received little could be done to improve matters.

After a tour of eight days in the line the battalion was relieved by the 2nd Leinster Regiment, and moved back to cellars and huts in Hervilly, behind Brigade Headquarters, and spent its time on working parties under the R.E. in the neighbourhood of Roisel, and in building huts and transport lines.

Owing to the condition of the trenches, the tour of duty in the trenches was soon reduced to one of four days, during which time a company spent two in the front line and two in immediate support.

On October 8th the battalion carried out a raid on the enemy's trenches, and Lance-Corporal E. R. Hart and Private W. Skelton entered the German lines and shot two sentries, but were unable to obtain an identification. After four days in Brigade reserve in Templeux Quarries, behind Hargicourt, the battalion during its next tour in the line carried out a raid on a larger scale. Two officers (2nd-Lieutenants Pearson and Barnes) and 60 other ranks divided into two parties, left their trenches at 1.35 a.m. to enter the German lines at the same point as had been entered before; but as the enemy was "standing to," the parties were unable to force an entry, and withdrew at 2.35 a.m. Only one man was wounded, though both sides had exchanged a number of hand grenades.

The belief was gaining ground that the enemy would soon withdraw his line on this front, and thus every night raiding parties or patrols went out to visit the German lines, and Privates Varnham and Humphreys, two of the battalion scouts, soon acquired an intimate knowledge of the geography of No Man's Land.

This idea of a withdrawal soon gave way, however, in face of the preliminary success that had attended the German counter-attack at Cambrai, and when on

November 30th the enemy attacked and captured the villages of Villers Goislain and Gonnelleu from the 55th Division on the battalion's left, preparations were made to meet an attack on the 73rd Infantry Brigade front. Reports were received that the German 5th Guards Division was opposite this front, and that an attack was probably to be expected, and the support and reserve battalions took up their battle positions. No hostile attack, however, took place, and conditions gradually assumed their normal course.

As the Division grew to know this frontage, it was decided to hold it with two instead of three Brigades in the line, and to keep a complete Brigade out in reserve ; and thus, soon after Christmas Day, 1917, the front was organized into two Brigade sectors, and the 7th Northhamptons moved a bit south and relieved the 3rd Battalion The Rifle Brigade (17th Infantry Brigade).

Early in the New Year the possibility of a German offensive between St. Quentin and Cambrai was openly discussed, and it was realized that, since Russia might now be discounted as an effective ally, the initiative lay entirely with the enemy, and that until the enemy had disclosed his plans, arrangements must be made to meet a vigorous offensive on every sector of the allied front.

The Somme devastated area was specially suitable for such an offensive in many ways. Though the front system of trenches was becoming fairly strong, no system at all existed in the rear until the old battle-fields of 1916 were reached, and even these defences were being rapidly demolished by the salvage parties of the Labour Corps and by German prisoners to provide material for the front line.

New roads and railways had, indeed, been constructed in the forward and rear areas, but the German staff knew well that no cover for men or guns existed for



miles, and these considerations alone made it probable that the main blow would fall on this sector.

The back areas were rapidly reconnoitred, and a maze of trenches and wire were mapped out on paper and given a name (*i.e.*, Black, Red, Brown, Green), and efforts were made to build up a strong defensive system. For the next two and a half months the 24th Division worked as it had never worked before, but the frontage was too large, and so much else remained to be done, that when the blow fell on March 21st these defences for the most part existed only on maps or in tape-marks over the country-side.

The early months of the year were very wet, and further hutment accommodation and recreation for the men was essential. Camps were built at Bernes, Hancourt, Vraignes, and Montigny Farm, and theatre huts and cinemas were erected, for without some places of amusement the desolation of this area would have been overwhelming.

Major-General A. C. Daly, who had taken over command of the 24th Division when Major-General Bols had been summoned to Egypt, took a great personal interest in the welfare of the men, and did all he could to encourage improvements of all kinds in the camps, and took a keen interest in all forms of recreation.

Towards the end of February orders were issued that the Cavalry Corps would relieve the 24th Division in the line, and that on relief the Division was to proceed back to the neighbourhood of Amiens, and that the 73rd Infantry Brigade were to be billeted round Boves. On February 28th advance parties left for this area under the Staff Captain, 73rd Infantry Brigade (Captain H. W. W. Hills, Royal Fusiliers), but soon after this party had left, orders were received that, in view of the threatened attack, the 24th Division would not be relieved. This order was a great blow to the Division, which had not been out of the line since

July last, and which had been kept very busy for the last few months on working parties and the like.

At the beginning of March it became evident that the German offensive would soon commence, and the 7th Northhamptons were held in Corps Reserve at Hancourt. Almost daily reports were received that the attack would take place next morning. The battalion was under orders to be ready to move off anywhere in half an hour, and thus the men were kept in or near their camp when not engaged on working parties. The battle stations allotted to the 7th Northhamptons consisted of four so-called redoubts between the villages of Jeancourt and Vendelles.

These positions, situated on high ground, were very exposed to artillery fire, and being little more than scrapings in the ground about 3 feet deep, afforded no cover of any sort. On March 20th the Commanding Officer and a party of officers reconnoitred these positions, and in view of a special report that had been received, the battalion spent the night of March 20th-21st in especial readiness to move up in support.

Lieutenant-Colonel S. S. Hayne had been commanding the battalion for some time now, as Lieutenant-Colonel D. W. Powell had been transferred to England. Captain A. W. Heaton had left the battalion in January to be attached to the 73rd Infantry Brigade Headquarters, and 2nd-Lieutenant A. E. Barton was acting Adjutant, and Captain N. H. Mattock was acting Second-in-Command.

## CHAPTER XIV

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*To face page 84*



position, and a report was sent back to Brigade Headquarters. At 1.30 p.m. the battalion, with considerable difficulty, extricated itself from its position and withdrew to Hancourt through the 50th Division.

This Division (50th) had been brought up from Corps Reserve, and had been disposed along the defensive position, known as the Green Line, along the whole Nineteenth Corps front; and as the trenches were only dug to the depth of 1 foot, and the Division had been spread along its whole length, it could not be expected that the troops would offer any protracted resistance on that line. So elongated was their front that when the battalion crossed this line between Bernes and Flechin about 2 p.m. hardly a man of the 50th Division could be seen holding the line.

After concentrating at Hancourt the battalion proceeded to Meraucourt, where, along with the remainder of the 24th Division, it passed the night. It was still hoped that the 50th Division would be able to prevent any further advance of the enemy, but early next morning (the 22nd) the battalion was ordered to take up a defensive line in front of Flez, and in the event of a further withdrawal becoming necessary, to cover the withdrawal of the 24th Division in a westerly direction. The battalion was in position by 4 a.m., and about 8 a.m. troops on the left flank could be seen withdrawing; and soon after orders were received that the battalion, among others, would form the rear guard for the Division falling back on the line of the Somme River at Falvy.

Owing to the rapidity of the German advance and the impossibility of reinforcing the British line east of the Somme, it had been decided not to make a serious stand east of that river, but to withdraw all troops to the high ground on the western bank.

The Somme Bridge at Falvy was allotted to the 24th Division, and it was at once obvious that the successful withdrawal of a whole Division over one bridge would

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be an exceedingly difficult operation. Brigadier-General P. V. P. Stone, 17th Infantry Brigade, was placed in charge of the rear guard, consisting of three battalions—the 7th Northhamptons, 1st North Staffords, and 3rd Rifle Brigade—and these battalions took up a line in the open country round Flez. It was essential for the success of the operation that no unit should become too heavily involved with the enemy, and yet sufficient time must be allowed to enable the remainder of the Division to cross the river.

The 1st North Staffords were sent back first, and later the 3rd Rifle Brigade, and the 7th Northhamptons took over the duty of sole rear guard. The country round Flez was very open, and the enemy could be seen advancing a long way off, and his field artillery was soon in action, firing over open sights. The chief difficulty, however, was experienced from a party of the enemy with machine guns that had worked round the right flank of the battalion and was enfilading the line. Meanwhile, however, the Division had safely crossed the Somme, and Lieutenant-Colonel S. S. Hayne skilfully withdrew his battalion, too, across the river, and the bridge was destroyed. The battalion passed through the 8th Division, which had hurriedly been brought up by train and was holding the high ground west of the river, and took up a position in support.

About 8 a.m. next morning (24th) the battalion was relieved in its support line by other troops of the 8th Division, and moved back to Chaulnes, where hot meals were prepared and the troops rested. At 3 p.m. however, the battalion was again ordered forward, and took up a position between Fonches and Fonchette. The night was spent in this position, but the battalion was not in touch with the enemy. Next morning (25th) the battalion received orders to co-operate with the 8th Division on its left and some French troops on its right in a counter-attack. The battalion came in

contact with the enemy east of Curchy, but, as the French had not attacked on their right, was compelled to form a defensive flank on the right. Sufficient troops were not, however, available to cover the gap now formed between the right of the battalion and the French, and thus, as the enemy had worked round this gap, the battalion was compelled to fall back on its original line between Fonches and Fonchette early in the afternoon.

The battalion was in constant contact with a greatly superior force of the enemy during the whole afternoon and succeeding night, but beat off several German patrols. The enemy was, however, in such numbers that a silent withdrawal was ordered at 3 a.m. next morning (26th) to a line between Hallu and Chaulnes, where the battalion was placed in Brigade Reserve.

The line was soon forced back to the village of Warvillers, and the battalion was once more involved with the enemy. A patrol under 2nd-Lieutenant Shaw was sent through the village of Meharicourt, and captured two of the enemy. A heavy attack was delivered at 11 p.m. by the enemy on the 9th Royal Sussex Regiment and "B" Company 7th Northhamptons on their left, but this was completely repulsed. Next morning the enemy attacked the 12th Sherwood Foresters and the Division on the left heavily about 8 a.m., but the 7th Northhamptons were able to enfilade this attack, and the line was restored.

Further attacks followed, and the battalion was involved in much hand-to-hand bombing, but by means of blocking trenches the battalion prevented the enemy from entering the 73rd Brigade front.

The 24th Division found itself, however, again in danger of being cut off, as both flanks were in the air, and a withdrawal was ordered to the neighbourhood of Caix. At 2 a.m. the battalion withdrew through the 13th Middlesex Regiment, who were holding Warvillers Village, and reached the new line near Caix



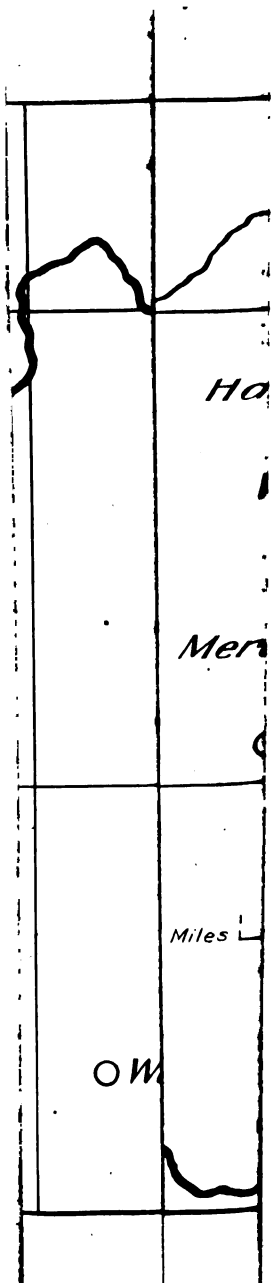
about 11.30 a.m. During the afternoon both flanks of the Brigade had again been turned, and a hasty withdrawal was imperative, as the enemy was already in the rear of the battalion.

French troops had been brought up in support, and the battalion was ordered to fall back on Villers aux Erables. On arrival at this village, the whole 24th Division was found to be collecting, and it was rumoured that buses would be provided to take the Division back.

The French, however, had not been able to hold back the enemy in front of Bocourt, and the battalion was ordered to fall back on Castel. This march was carried out after dark, and, as the position of the enemy was unknown, roads had to be avoided as far as possible, and thus the battalion carried out a compass march across country, and took up a position in the Bois de Sencat above Castel, having crossed the River Avre at the latter place.

The battalion spent the remainder of the night in this wood, and next morning (29th) were ordered to move forward and hold the bridgehead at Castel. Towards evening the Brigade was withdrawn into support, and the battalion moved into billets at Thezy-Glimont.

Next day, however (30th) orders were received to defend the bridgeheads at Berteaucourt and Thennes, and the battalion was disposed as under :—" B " Company at Berteaucourt ; " D " Company at Thennes ; and " A " and " C " Companies in support. The cavalry made a counter-attack during the afternoon, and drove the enemy out of the wood on the high ground north-east of Berteaucourt, and thus greatly improved the position for the battalion. Next day (31st), however, the 8th Division, who had relieved the cavalry, were driven out of this wood ; but before the North-amptons were relieved that evening the cavalry had again captured the wood.





On relief, the battalion returned to billets in Thezy-Glimont for the night. Next day (April 1st) the battalion again manned the bridgehead with two companies, where the battalion remained until April 4th.

Early on that day the battalion moved off and took up a position in the south-east corner of Bois de Gentelles, about three miles south-west of Villers-Bretonneux. The battalion was relieved there on April 5th, and marched back to Longueau, outside Amiens, where the night (April 5th-6th) was spent before the battalion proceeded by motor buses and train to a rest area.

The 24th Division had borne the attack of no less than eleven German Divisions since March 21st, and the battalion had been engaged in almost incessant fighting and marching for sixteen days, and had suffered heavily. The Fifth Army has been much criticized by some for the loss of ground in the March withdrawal, but such criticism is not worthy of consideration. The history of the 24th Division during those days was typical of that of many other divisions, and the history of the 7th Northhamptons similar to that of many other battalions.

The whole Army had been repeatedly threatened with annihilation, but the doggedness of the private soldier and the leadership of the subordinate commanders had saved everything ; and the 7th Northhamptons, though reduced in numbers, survived that period of stress as a unit—individually depressed, perhaps, but collectively confident of eventual victory.

The battalion had experienced the worst the enemy could do, and remained unbroken in spirit, and the mere temporary loss of square miles of devastated area could not be accounted as worse than a reverse. At times, indeed, the situation had seemed desperate—as, for example, as Falvy and at Caix—but before the battalion was relieved on April 5th the enemy's advance had been already stopped short of any position of real

strategic importance like Amiens, and the arrival of fresh troops made it likely that the fortunes of war would soon desert the German.

All units of the 24th Division had fought desperately and performed superhuman feats, and its work did not pass unnoticed. Besides being twice mentioned in Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig's communiqués, the Divisional Commander also received the following congratulatory messages :—

1. *From Lieutenant-General Sir C. T. McM. Kavanagh, K.C.B., C.V.O., D.S.O., Commanding Cavalry Corps.*

MY DEAR DALY,

A line of congratulation on the way the 24th Division have been, and still are, fighting. I am delighted to hear it from all sides, especially as I said to the Army Commander that they would.

Yours sincerely,  
(Signed) C. M. KAVANAGH.

2. *Telegram from G.O.C. 19th Corps to G.O.C. 24th Division.*

Please accept and convey to all ranks my warmest congratulations and thanks for your splendid efforts during the last few days.

The fighting spirit and powers of endurance shown are beyond all praise, and have been of vital importance in maintaining the front of the 19th Corps.

(Signed) H. E. WATTS, *Lieut.-General,*  
*Commanding 19th Corps.*

3. *From Major-General Sir J. E. Capper, K.C.B.,  
Commanding Tank Corps (late G.O.C. 24th  
Division).*

LONDON.

DEAR DALY,

I was overjoyed to see that the 24th Division had won special commendation from the Chief for its conduct during the first rush of the German offensive.

Will you please allow me to congratulate you and the Division on its behaviour. It still holds a particularly warm place in my heart, and I would most gladly be with it instead of being here, where fighting is not part of my job.

The best of good wishes and luck to the best Division in the British Army, and therefore in the world.

Yours sincerely,  
(Signed) J. E. CAPPER.

4. *From Major-General L. J. Bols, K.C.M.G., C.B.,  
D.S.O. (late G.O.C. 24th Division).*

[TELEGRAM.]

CAIRO.

Well done, good soldiers !—GENERAL BOLS.

Praise such as this is not easily won in the Army, where bravery is taken for granted, and should silence for ever the groundless calumnies of armchair critics.

Never had the 7th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment fought harder or endured greater privations and never had it deserved so much to be ranked alongside the Regular battalions of the county regiment.

## CHAPTER XV

### HILL 70 AND LENS

ON leaving Longueau the battalion proceeded by motor buses to Saleaux, and entrained for a rest area on the mouth of the Somme.

Detraining at St. Valery, the battalion was met by its advance party and led to the village of Escarbotin, where billets had been arranged. The following day the transport section, that had proceeded by road, arrived, and no time was lost in reorganizing the battalion and refitting the men with clothing and necessities. It was realized that the rest was not likely to be a long one, in view of the fresh offensive that the enemy was threatening, and so the most was made of the time while it lasted. Classes for specialists (Lewis gunners, signallers, etc) were started and the battalion was inspected on parade by the Brigadier-General Commanding, who congratulated the troops personally on their conduct during the recent operations.

On April 13th the battalion marched to the seaside at Ault, a few miles from Le Treport, and spent the day on the beach, where the companies were photographed, returning in the evening to their billets in Escarbotin.

On April 16th orders were received that the Division was to be transferred to the First Army area, and on the 17th the battalion entrained at Woincourt. After a journey of nearly ten hours, the battalion detrained at Pernes and marched nine miles to billets in Houdain, a small town two miles south of Bruay.

It seemed probable that a German offensive would soon open on this front, which included the chief coal-fields of the North of France, and the civilian popula-

tion of Bruay and Houdain had been greatly reinforced by the inhabitants of villages nearer the line, and it was thus with great difficulty that billets for troops could be found.

M. Clemenceau visited the area occupied by the battalion on April 24th during his visit to this neighbourhood, but the stay at Houdain was otherwise uneventful.

On April 23rd German aeroplanes flew over the area and dropped bombs on some huts occupied by the battalion, killing 7 men and wounding 19, besides causing 8 casualties among the horses.

On April 30th at 3 a.m. the battalion received orders to march at once to the neighbourhood of Sains-en-Gohelle, but on arrival at Barlin after a five-mile march was recalled to Houdain, owing to a German attack farther north. Next day, however, the battalion marched via Barlin to Les Brebis, a distance of ten miles, and the following day relieved the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles in the front line in the Hill 70 area.

The 7th Northhamptons were not new to this area, though the last time they had been in the sector Hill 70 had been in German hands, and the back area round Les Brebis was familiar to the older members of the battalion. The new trenches, on the whole, were good, and there was a fairly plentiful supply of deep dug-outs, and the front, moreover, was comparatively quiet. It was thought, however, that this quiet portended a coming battle, and in view of the importance of the area of the coalfields, special precautions were taken to meet an attack. The tour in the front line was confined to four days at a time, and on relief the battalion moved back only a short way into some old British defences near two old mine craters (Harts and Harrisons).

On the evening of May 8th warning was received that an attack was expected the following night. The



battalion "stood to" from 8.30 p.m. till 7 a.m., but no attack developed, and working parties were continued.

The chief feature of this sector was a network of old mining galleries under Hill 70. These had been opened up by the 3rd Australian Tunnelling Company and fitted up with electric light. The system ran from a quarry outside Loos village right under the hill with a sally-port in No Man's Land. Branching off from the main gallery were a series of short tunnels, each with an exit at the far end, and room for a sentry post. Cut out of the chalk rock, these tunnels, known as Hythe Tunnel, were perfectly dry, and were, moreover, proof against the heaviest shell. For the defence of Hill 70 this position was invaluable. There was, however, always the danger of the tunnels proving a death-trap in the event of an attack or of them becoming filled with gas. In order to guard against these dangers and to maintain the upkeep of the gas curtains on the exits and see to the sanitation, a junior officer was appointed to look after the tunnel, with the title of Town Major, Hythe Tunnel. The business of this officer and his staff was no easy one, for besides the garrison from the battalion, the passages were usually full of tunnellers and visitors, to whom the novelty of this system of defence appealed, and the Town Major had to be a man of more than ordinary good humour to answer the number of questions strange staff and other officers addressed to him.

While the front line was comparatively quiet, the back areas were shelled and bombed nearly every night, and Les Brebis, where were situated the battalion transport lines and quartermaster's stores, was a favourite target for these shoots. On May 17th four men were wounded in the transport field, and three mules killed.

After a tour in the line and one in Brigade support, the battalion moved back after the next tour in the

line to Divisional reserve in Les Brebis, where it was engaged in building dug-outs at Divisional Headquarters and constructing defences in rear of the front line. The 24th Division and the 11th Division on its left had been busy discharging gas in projectors whenever the wind was favourable, and on May 31st, while the battalion was in the front line, the enemy retaliated with the same weapon, causing twelve casualties, six of whom died of gas-poisoning during the next three days.

Conditions remained much the same for the next few days; rumours of attacks still spread, but no attacks developed.

On June 12th Lieutenant-Colonel S. S. Hayne left the battalion to command his regular battalion. He had commanded since before the March battle, and all ranks were very sorry to lose him. The next day Lieutenant-Colonel E. C. S. Grune (Suffolk Regiment) took over the command, and held the position until the battalion was disbanded in June, 1919.

Hitherto the battalion had been singularly free from any sickness or disease, but on June 17th a form of influenza broke out in the battalion.

This form of influenza, known as "pyrexia," was particularly virulent and developed very quickly. Thirty cases were reported the first day during the afternoon, and in a week's time the cases numbered over 200, including a number of officers. This epidemic was not confined to the British troops alone; the enemy was known to be suffering from it even more seriously than the Allies. It had, however, seriously reduced the military efficiency of the Division (the cases running into several thousands) just at a time when active operations were expected, and it is perhaps charitable to think that the London Press was purposely untruthful when a leading daily paper announced at the height of the epidemic that "the health of the British and American troops is uniformly good, and the in-

fluenza scourge has not made its appearance in our camps or trenches" (British censorship *sic*).

The rapidity with which this epidemic spread was in itself a good thing, for in about a fortnight nearly every man had suffered from it in some degree, and it thus died out.

On July 16th Brigadier-General W. Dugan, C.M.G., D.S.O., left the Brigade to join General Maxse's training staff, and Brigadier-General J. C. Collins, C.M.G., D.S.O. (Berkshire Regiment) took over command of the 73rd Infantry Brigade.

The remainder of July passed without any particular incident. The German offensive had not materialized, and in view of the successes that were attending the Allies on other fronts, the initiative was rapidly passing from the Germans to the Allies, and thus within a month all ideas of defensive had been subordinated to those of offensive, and the battalion found itself once more preparing, if not to attack the enemy, at any rate to pursue him as he withdrew to a stronger and shorter line.

Lieutenant-General Sir A. Hunter-Weston, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.P., had taken over command of the Eighth Corps, and all the units in the Corps settled down to transport shows and general "spit and polish," to which the new Corps Commander was known to attach the greatest importance. At the 24th Divisional Horse Show, held on August 8th, the 7th Northhamptons won first prize in the heavy draught horse class, as well as in the "V.C. race" for other ranks.

Night bombing activity was still very great on both sides of the line, and on August 10th, during the bombing of Les Brebis, where the battalion was in reserve, a large aerial torpedo fell on a billet occupied by the 3rd Rifle Brigade, and caused several casualties both to that battalion and also to the 7th Northhamptons, who were in billets alongside.

On August 26th the battalion suddenly received

orders to take over a sector of the line near Lens from the 20th Division, and proceeded the same night and relieved the 7th D.C.L.I. in the outskirts of that town. It was exceedingly difficult to discover what line or posts the enemy held in Lens, as the town appeared by day to be deserted, but parts were certainly occupied by night. Patrols were thus pushed out by day and night to locate the enemy, and several bombing encounters took place. On August 31st, however, two German pioneers came into the battalion's line and gave themselves up, furnishing valuable information. Acting on this information, the following night an important position known as The Green Crassier was occupied by a platoon and two sections. During the next tour in the line the battalion occupied Fosse 5 and established posts there, but was unable to dislodge the enemy from Château Spriet in the centre of Lens.

On August 19th a German patrol attacked the battalion's post in the Boulevard des Ecole in Lens, and fighting ensued in which a German officer and two privates were killed and two German N.C.Os. captured, while the remaining member of the patrol escaped, though wounded.

The fighting round the ruins of Lens was exceedingly difficult, as every house had been strongly defended with concrete, and whole rows of cellars thus defended had been linked up, forming underground passages and barracks ; and apropos of these difficulties a wag inscribed the following Limerick :—

“ Said a sub. to one of his friends,  
As she showed him her latest from Venns,  
‘ Though they look most inviting,  
They’re not so exciting,  
As the outskirts and undies of Lens.’ ”

As the enemy had neither attacked nor withdrawn his line, the 24th Division was relieved in the Lens

area on September 30th by the 58th Division, a tired division that had recently seen much fighting.

The battalion had spent three and a half months in the line round Loos and Lens, and was only too anxious to take its part in offensive operations once more.

The operations of last March were fresh in their memory, and the battalion had several scores to settle. Few, however, dared to hope, after the experience of previous years, that within a year the war would be over, the 7th Northhamptons disbanded, and a narrative of their battles being composed by a former member of the battalion.



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<b>DOUAI</b>		
		<i>Aube</i>

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE FINAL OFFENSIVE

ON September 30th the 7th Northamptonshire Regiment was relieved by two battalions of the 58th Division (the 10th and 12th Battalions the London Regiment), and marched to huts at Coupigny. Entraining next day at Hersin-Coupigny, the battalion detrained at Mondicourt, after a journey of nine and a half hours, and marched to billets in Grouches, where a few days were spent in company training. On October 6th the battalion proceeded by train to Hermies, and thence marched to a field east of Mocuvres, where all ranks bivouacked in the open. The 24th Division was now in support of the 63rd (Naval) Division, and was under orders to proceed through that division at short notice. The following afternoon the battalion moved up to an area south-west of Caintaing, and relieved a unit of the 190th Infantry Brigade (63rd Division) four miles south-west of Cambrai.

In order to push forward the advance as rapidly as possible and to prevent the enemy from consolidating his new positions, every division was allotted only a narrow frontage, and the three Brigades were alternately occupied in attack in support and in reserve. On October 8th, after a Brigade of the 63rd Division had captured the village of Niergnies, two miles south of Cambrai, the 72nd Infantry Brigade (24th Division) was ordered to pass through them with the 73rd Brigade in close support. The 72nd Brigade captured Avoingt without much difficulty, and at 2 p.m. on October 9th the 7th Northhamptons were ordered to reconnoitre the neighbourhood of Cagnoncles.



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The large town of Cambrai had not been attacked frontally, but the enemy had been forced to evacuate it owing to the advance of the Canadian Corps to the north and of the 63rd and 24th Divisions to the south, and thus the 7th Northhamptons contributed as much as any other unit to the capture of this town, for which the Press gave sole credit to the Canadian troops.

The village of Cagnoncles was admirably situated for a rear guard defensive position, and the enemy had defended it very skilfully with wire, trench mortars, and machine guns, and the battalion encountered stubborn opposition. By 5 p.m. the battalion, however, had captured the high ground overlooking the village, but the village itself remained in the hands of the enemy. Captain Pearson, with a strong patrol of "D" Company, went out to reconnoitre the village, but never returned; and 2nd-Lieutenant Boal ("C" Company) was mortally wounded while taking his company up in support. Two other officers (2nd-Lieutenants Cutting and Clements) were also killed while leading their men forward, and others were wounded. The village was held too strongly to be taken without artillery preparation, and thus it was decided to dig in on the high ground, and wait till sufficient artillery had moved up to deal with the German machine guns.

At 5.30 a.m., under an artillery barrage, the whole battalion moved forward and captured the village, securing 11 prisoners, 13 machine guns, and a number of heavy and light trench mortars, and continued the advance in a north-easterly direction. The battalion had dislodged the enemy from his position at Cagnoncles only after heavy fighting, in which they had lost 4 officers killed, 2 wounded, and 85 other ranks killed and wounded. The capture of this village had demanded great initiative on the part of junior officers and N.C.Os., and was one of the finest pieces of work the battalion did during the war. A tour of the village



*Photo : "Northampton Independent." ]*

**LIEUT.-COL. E. C. S. GRUNE.**

*To face page 100.*



after its capture demonstrated the skill with which it had been defended, and several highly-placed officers considered it the best-defended locality that was encountered during the final advance.

The enemy had doubtless attached great importance to the place, and when it had once been captured the battalion was enabled to push forward the advance without any serious opposition until the 13th Middlesex Regiment were ordered to advance through the battalion about 10 p.m. that day (October 10th).

By that time the Northhamptons had captured the village of Rieux, and in that neighbourhood they spent the next two days reorganizing and resting.

Meanwhile, other troops of the 24th Division had continued the advance, and on October 24th the battalion was ordered to move up to billets in Avesnes Lez Aubert.

Across the front allotted to the 24th Division lay a series of small rivers, and these were a serious obstacle to a rapid advance. The enemy had destroyed all the bridges, and it took time before new ones could be made to carry transport and guns. The River La Selle afforded special difficulty, as the enemy stubbornly defended the high ground on the eastern bank, and the 17th and 72nd Brigades had successively failed to make good this bank.

Early on October 18th the battalion was ordered to leave Avesnes and move up in close support of the 72nd Infantry Brigade. Two companies and Battalion Headquarters established themselves in the village of St. Aubert with two companies just west of the river. The 9th East Surrey Regiment and the 8th Royal West Kent Regiment (72nd Brigade) had succeeded in capturing the village of Haussy on the east bank of the river, but the enemy was still in possession of the greater part of the high ground, and at 1 p.m. delivered a heavy counter-attack, and drove the majority of these battalions back across the river after heavy

H



fighting. At 4 p.m. the battalion was ordered to relieve the elements of these two battalions that still remained in the village with two companies, and the operation was successfully carried out by "A" and "D" Companies. Early next morning (17th) word was received at Battalion Headquarters that "A" Company had been cut off and surrounded by the enemy in Haussy, as the enemy had regained during the night the command of the bridgeheads. Captain Williamson (O.C. "A" Company) had, however, discovered that the enemy was in his rear, and, realizing the danger, had ordered his remaining men to rush the bridgeheads. This prompt action undoubtedly saved the entire company from capture, and all the officers and 58 other ranks safely reached the western bank.

"D" Company in another portion of the village was now isolated, and word was sent them to withdraw to the high ground on the western bank. After the heavy fighting during the day, the battalion was relieved by a unit of the 56th Division and marched back to billets in Avesnes.

As far as the 24th Division was concerned, the first stage of the battle was over. The novelty of this form of warfare had been much appreciated, but all ranks were thoroughly tired and exhausted.

Rest had been very difficult to procure, as even when the battalion was not attacking it was engaged almost continuously in marching and following up the advancing troops.

After spending a night at Avesnes, the battalion marched to billets in Cauroir, three miles east of Cambrai, where a week was spent in resting and training the troops. In view of the importance of night operations in this form of warfare, special attention was devoted to this during the period; while the Battalion once more demonstrated its athletic supremacy by winning seven of the

events in the sports arranged by the 73rd Infantry Brigade.

The 56th Division had meanwhile continued the advance and captured Haussy, and on October 26th the battalion moved up and occupied billets in that village. On November 2nd the battalion was ordered up to Bermerain, and the following night bivouacked for the night west of Sepmeries.

The 24th Division had once more taken over the position of forward Division on the Corps front, and on November 3rd the battalion was ordered to detail two companies to support the 9th Royal Sussex Regiment in an attack from a line west of the Jenlain—Villers-Pol road. "B" and "D" Companies (Captains B. Wright and J. A. Elliman) were detailed for this work. The attack commenced at 6 a.m. on November 4th. "D" Company suffered heavily from the German barrage, and Captain Elliman was wounded. By 8 a.m. "B" Company had established a line on the high ground in front of Wargnies le Petit, and by capturing this ground commanded the bridge over the River Aunelle and the main Jenlain—Bavai road, which separated the two villages of Wargnies le Petit and Wargnies le Grand. It had been decided to capture these villages, and while the 13th Middlesex Regiment took Wargnies le Grand, the 7th Northampton were ordered to capture Wargnies le Petit on the south side of the road. "A" and "C" Companies were detailed for this operation, "C" Company, under Lieutenant J. C. Pike, forming the front wave of the attack. The village was defended with a number of machine guns, but these were eventually overcome by grenades and rifle fire, and the two companies established a line well forward of the village, and captured 50 prisoners.

Early next morning, November 6th, the 17th Infantry Brigade passed through the battalion, and the 7th Northampton occupied billets in the village they

had captured. A number of French civilians still remained in occupation of their houses, and treated the battalion with the greatest hospitality and made their new visitors as comfortable as they could. To realize what the German occupation had meant to the French it was necessary to see the enthusiasm with which they greeted "ces bons soldats," and the bravery with which they faced the inevitable shelling that followed the evacuation of the Germans could not but evoke the most ardent admiration of the British troops. One incident should be mentioned in connection with Wagnies le Petit. On the arrival of the 17th Infantry Brigade it was found that the rightful *Maire* of the commune had been deposed by the Germans for displaying partiality to the Allies, and a man of German tendencies had been appointed in his place. This was reported to the British authorities, and the author had the pleasure of accompanying the French interpreter (M. Luneau, D.C.M., M.M.) as he visited the rightful *Maire* and reinstated him in his office. The inhabitants were delighted, and the deposed official accepted the inevitable with what good grace he could muster.

On November 7th the battalion was moved forward through La Bois Crette and St. Waast and took over billets in Bavai, an important road centre.

The road had been destroyed by mines in many places, and it was with difficulty that the transport was able to bring up rations and stores that night. The town itself was undamaged and full of civilians, and the battalion was very comfortably billeted. Battalion Headquarters was established in the house of one of the chief citizens—a house that during the early days of the war had once formed the General Headquarters of Field Marshal Sir John French.

The following day the battalion left Bavai and moved to Le Louvion, two miles outside, and within a few hours moved forward three and a half miles to

La Longueville in support of the 72nd Infantry Brigade. Orders were received that the battalion would attack the following morning on a front of 1,000 yards on the north of the 72nd Infantry Brigade.

At 5.45 a.m. the battalion moved off, "A" Company forming the advance guard, with "C" Company in support. The advance scouts found that the village of Les Guelaros was clear of the enemy, and then linked up with the 8th Royal West Kent Regiment and passed on through the hamlet of Le Floricamp to some high ground east of Mairiaux. An outpost line was established to the west of this village in the neighbourhood of the Mons—Maubeuge main road.

Next day, November 10th, the battalion was relieved by a battalion of the 20th Division, and about midday moved back to billets at La Raguele, near Feignies.

Early the following morning the battalion marched back to the neighbourhood of Bavai, and occupied billets in Louvignies-Bavai, receiving on the march the news that the Germans had accepted the Allied Armistice terms.

The war had meant too much to all who had participated in it in any way for any hilarious rejoicings at its completion, but the feelings of thankfulness that took possession of all ranks on receipt of this news can be better understood than described.

On the line that the 7th Northamptonshire Regiment had reached the war ended—a line that had been reached only through the heroism and endurance of all ranks; a war that had taken a heavy toll of the bravest and best.

Victory had been won—not indeed the victory of dreamers of 1914, but a victory consecrated by earlier failures.

The 7th Northamptonshire Regiment had borne its share in these glorious failures, and now had contributed its share in the final victory.

Since detraining at Hermies the battalion had advanced forty-seven miles as the crow flies, and had been fighting most of the way. The loss of ground in March last had been more than avenged. The British Army had accomplished what the Germans had essayed and failed to do : it had won the battle, defeated the enemy, and finished the war.

## CHAPTER XVII

### ARMISTICE

THE signing of the Armistice terms on November 11th brought the fighting on the Western Front to an end, but it did not mean that units would be disbanded forthwith. Peace had yet to be signed and security for its fulfilment insured before troops could be disbanded, and even then the transport difficulties and the labour market would not permit of any immediate demobilization of large numbers. The 7th Northhamptons had yet seven months to spend abroad before the demobilization of the battalion would be completed, and these months were destined to be full of incidents and difficulties.

On November 17th the battalion left the Bavai area and marched back to Wargnies le Grand, and on November 18th moved on to Denain. From there the battalion marched to Auberchicourt, midway between Denain and Douai, where a few days were spent before the march was continued via Rumegies to Mouchin, where the whole battalion was billeted in a brewery. On December 6th the battalion left Mouchin and marched to Bachy, a small village about six miles south-west of Tournai. It had been at first intended that the battalion should occupy this area during the whole period of demobilization. The billets, however, were so poor, and training and recreational facilities so indifferent, that a move was made later to Tournai.

While at Bachy the 7th Northhamptons discovered that the 2nd Northhamptons were in billets at Lamain, a few miles off; and as the late Commanding Officer of the 7th Battalion was in command of that battalion

(Lieutenant-Colonel S. S. Hayne), a football match was arranged between the battalions, which the 7th Battalion won by one goal to nil. On December 16th advance parties reconnoitred the village of Esplechin, nearer Tournai, as the battalion was under orders to proceed there. Those orders were, however, cancelled, and on December 21st the battalion received orders to occupy billets in Tournai. The officers were billeted in private houses, and the other ranks accommodated in the Asylum, a large building with excellent accommodation. Shortly after the arrival of the troops in this Asylum, a fire broke out, and at one time it seemed probable that the whole building would be destroyed. The fire picket, however, isolated the fire by their prompt action before the arrival of a somewhat antique Belgian fire-engine. This engine, after much noise and considerable delay, managed to work a small stream of water on to the scene of the fire, which was eventually extinguished.

No casualties had been caused by the fire, but numerous Courts of Inquiry and much correspondence failed to elicit the cause of the outbreak, which to-day remains a mystery.

The Army System of Education had been introduced into the 24th Division, and now the battalion was at last, after more than a month's wanderings, in its final quarters, classes were arranged, and instruction in arithmetic, French, and other subjects became part of the regular curriculum.

Christmas Day, 1918, was spent in these billets, and extra fare was provided for the battalion out of canteen profits. Early in the New Year demobilization started for the Division, and on January 11th the first party of six other ranks was dispatched for England, and from that date parties were sent with fair regularity once or twice a week.

This system of demobilization by classes, depending on previous civilian occupation, was undoubtedly the

only course to adopt; but the gradual dwindling of the battalion made such matters as educational and recreational training increasingly difficult, and by the end of January the educational training, excellent in theory, became practically unworkable.

The battalion was thus melting away slowly, and by February 12th it was impossible to maintain the four companies, and thus these companies were formed into two under Captain A. H. Webb and Captain A. O. Marshall.

To maintain its identity for purposes of demobilization and for taking charge of equipment and stores, each unit was ordered to provide itself with a cadre. This nucleus of about 4 officers and 50 men was composed of volunteers who would, when all others had been demobilized, proceed to England as a unit, and, after handing over stores, be demobilized themselves. No difficulty was experienced in finding a sufficient number of volunteers, as it was believed that all cadres would be themselves demobilized by the end of March. Such, however, was not to be.

Hitherto a Service Battalion had not possessed any Colours, and, in view of their approaching disbandment, it had been decided that a Colour should be presented to all Service Battalions in France. On February 17th, accordingly, the 73rd Infantry Brigade paraded on the Champs de Manœuvre at Tournai, and each battalion received its Colours from the General Officer Commanding First Army, who commented very favourably on the smart turn-out and drill of the parade.

A large number of the latest-joined members of the battalion were not eligible for immediate demobilization under the existing regulations, and these officers and men and volunteers were detailed to proceed to other units which were not being broken up; and on March 14th the first draft of 5 officers and 151 other ranks proceeded to join the 4th Suffolk Regiment in



the London Division on the Rhine. The remainder of the battalion was now organized as Battalion Headquarters and one company (under Captain Wright).

It had become increasingly difficult to spare transport personnel for demobilization, in view of the fact that the battalion still retained its horses and mules and its vehicles. Horses and mules were now gradually classified and disposed of, while on March 18th all vehicles were handed in to a Divisional Vehicle Park at Railhead (Baisieux). This system effected a real saving of personnel, and the Transport Section thenceforth took its place with the remainder of the battalion for purposes of demobilization drafts. Whereas the Division when at full strength had been spread over a wide area as the units became reduced to cadre strength, efforts were made to concentrate the cadres round Baisieux Railhead, and the battalion was ordered to move to the village of Creplaine on March 27th. In view, however, of a number of working parties the battalion was providing daily in Tournai, the battalion cadre was allowed to remain in Tournai, though it was moved from the Asylum to billets nearer Tournai Station.

Drafts were dispatched to the 4th Suffolk Regiment, and various Prisoners of War Companies as transport was allotted, and by the middle of April the battalion was reduced to cadre strength. Rumours of the dispatch of cadres to England were now of everyday occurrence, but, except for authority to reduce the numbers to be retained as a cadre, nothing happened till on May 13th the cadre received orders that it would proceed to England on the 17th instant. For some reason or other, never satisfactorily explained, this order was cancelled on the 16th, and the cadre did not eventually entrain till June 2nd.

This incident, of supreme importance for all those who had waited for that day for many long months, deserves special mention. Owing to the different

capacity for vehicle axles on the trains provided by the French authorities for this purpose, it had not been possible to insure that the whole cadre and its transport would be able to be accommodated on the train allotted for June 2nd, and the battalion had been warned that any surplus would be dispatched on June 3rd. It was found, however, that the complete cadre could be dispatched when the unit commenced to entrain at 3 p.m., and by 4 p.m. officers, men, and stores were all packed away. The train, however, did not leave Baisieux Station till 9 p.m., arriving at Antwerp twelve hours later.

At Antwerp the cadre was occupied in unloading the vehicles and storing them in hangars on the quay, and when that was completed the troops returned to a camp, where they spent the following day.

On June 5th the cadre bathed, and then at 4 p.m. commenced to embark on s.s. *Sicilian*. Stores and vehicles were loaded on s.s. *Kalix*, and proceeded to England independently. June 6th was spent on the water, and at 9.30 a.m. on June 7th the cadre of the 7th Northamptonshire Regiment arrived at Tilbury Docks, just two years after the memorable Battle of Messines.

The cadre was sent to Bordon Camp for demobilization, and, on representation being made to the War Office by the Mayor of Northampton, was permitted to visit that town on Saturday, June 14th, to receive a civic reception.

Arriving at Northampton Station about 1.30 p.m., the battalion was met by the Mayor and ex-Mayor, and a guard of honour of former members of the battalion, and marched to the Town Hall amid scenes of the wildest excitement and loud cheering. At the Town Hall the Mayor (Councillor J. J. Martin) entertained the cadre to a luncheon, after which the banquet hall filled with ex-members of the battalion, and speeches of welcome and thanks were made.

Soon after this "welcome home" the cadre of the battalion was disbanded, and the 7th Northamptonshire Regiment lived only as a glorious memory of what her country could do when foes threatened.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ENVOI

THE narrative of the chief incidents in the history of the 7th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment has now been brought to a close. No one is more conscious of the shortcomings of this book than the author. As was said in the introductory chapter, no claim is made for this book to represent a history in the true sense of the word. What has been aimed at is rather a brief outline, and if in the smallest degree these chapters have helped to keep alive the memory of the incidents referred to, its purpose has been achieved.

Little mention has been made of individual deeds of heroism, as such mention would have been invidious. Those who know anything of the hardships and dangers endured on active service will realize that the true hero is not only he who in a moment of intense stress performs seemingly superhuman acts of bravery, but also he who quietly does his duty unnoticed and unsung.

Many honours and decorations fell to individual members of the 7th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment; many more were won, but never conferred. But surely the highest honour a soldier can win is the knowledge that all his actions were not individual but social; that one aim was ever in view—not individual glory, but collective success; not personal recognition, but his unit's good name.

Mention has been made of the encouragement and support the battalion received during its five years' existence from friends at home, and especially from well-wishers in Northampton, and to those individuals and societies the author, in the name of all those who

ever served with the battalion, would wish to express his gratitude.

This book has been dedicated to the memory of those who fell on the field of battle: to the memory of two of the battalion's Commanding Officers, and to the memory of the private soldier who served only a few hours, maybe, with the battalion. To each and to all the 7th Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment owes a debt that can never be paid—and not the battalion only, now but a memory, but the entire world.











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